

CHAPTER 17

Portland Place

With its exceptional width and Adam architecture, Portland Place was one of the outstanding developments of its day, and despite extensive and often insensitive change remains one of London's most memorable streets. Among the many post-Adam buildings, Broadcasting House and the headquarters of the Royal Institute of British Architects, both dating from the 1930s, are of major national significance.

Though the Adams' scheme for terraces of spacious and highly sophisticated townhouses was to be fully realized in Portland Place, it was not matched by financial rewards, and from a business point of view came close to disaster. The brothers' involvement locally covered much more than just Portland Place, notably Mansfield Street, where their development began in the late 1760s, while land to either side of Portland Place was built up by others working under them, including large parts of Devonshire, New Cavendish, Hallam and Great Portland Streets – and a short stretch of Harley Street (see Ill. 17.3). But Portland Place was where the Adams' energies and architectural flair were chiefly concentrated. Nash's additions at either end – Park Crescent, Upper Regent Street and Langham Place (including the later Langham Hotel) – are discussed in succeeding chapters.

For a century Portland Place was one of London's most exclusive residential streets. But the big, expensive-to-run houses had lost their appeal by the early 1900s, when taller blocks of flats, often in a Beaux-Arts style, began to take their place. Subdivision and medical use, resisted at first by the Portland Estate, saved some; others have survived as legations and embassies.

The preponderance of stone-fronted flats and the central avenue of trees added in the late twentieth century now make it one of the most Continental of London thoroughfares.

Development under the Adam brothers

The genesis of Portland Place is intimately tied to the history of Foley House and the resolution in 1767 of a long-running dispute between the Foley family and the Portland Estate over ownership of the valuable open ground to its north (see also page ##). Thomas Foley eventually conceded his deceased cousin Lord Foley's claim to a long lease of that land, but he did get the 3rd Duke of Portland's agreement that if and when it was developed a 'large street or opening' would be left 'for ever' in front of Foley House to preserve the view northwards. Hence the unusual width of Portland Place – at around 125ft still commonly regarded as the widest street in London.¹

This concord was signed in January 1767 and confirmed by Act of Parliament in April. It was probably not long afterwards that James Adam began negotiations with the Duke to take some of the land for building, as by October final articles of agreement had been drawn up between them. James was often the lead negotiator and chief speculator in Adam business affairs. Much later his younger brother William explained in a letter to his nephew, also William, that it was 'principally' through James's efforts that the Marylebone leases and ground rents had been acquired.²

The details of those initial articles are not known but they covered only the southern half of Portland Place and the streets leading off it to either side, as far north as Weymouth Street – though there was in all likelihood an expectation by both parties that a further agreement for the northern half would follow on, as indeed it did in April 1776 (see Ill. 17.3).³ As explained

below, construction of the houses proceeded generally from south to north over a 20-year period, delayed above all by a downturn in the building industry in the later 1770s–80s and the Adams’ own financial crises during that time.

In the Adams’ original conception, before its incorporation by John Nash in the 1820s into his *via triumphalis* from Carlton House to Regent’s Park, Portland Place was a rare thing in London – a genuine *place*. Cut off at one end by Marylebone Fields and by the grounds of Foley House at the other, it was accessible from side streets only – to all intents a private enclave. Robert Adam did, however, see the advantage to his development of continuing it north over the Crown’s lands to the New (now Marylebone) Road, and tried in 1772 to persuade Peter Burrell, Surveyor General of the Crown Lands, to arrange for the lease of that ground to be transferred to the Duke of Portland but without success.⁴

Before looking in detail at the Adams’ activities in Portland Place, two oft-repeated myths must be addressed. One is that, as executed in the 1770s–90s, it was the work of James Adam, Robert having lost interest once an initial scheme for more elaborate houses had collapsed. This hypothesis stems largely from a misinterpretation of James’s obituary in the *Gentleman’s Magazine* in 1794, two years after Robert’s death, where Portland Place is cited as a ‘monument of his taste and abilities in his profession’. But the obituary refers also to the Adelphi in the same terms – and no-one has ever argued that this was James’s initiative. The working relationship between the two architect brothers remains largely a mystery and separating responsibilities in their projects is ultimately fruitless: Portland Place, like so much of their *oeuvre*, should be viewed as a joint enterprise. What is certain, though, is that the drive, energy and genius for design rested with Robert, who is unlikely to have relinquished control of such a prestigious, large-scale development in the capital, where his particular skill for ingenious planning was crucial. In

addition, several surviving Adam office drawings for Portland Place are in Robert's hand, as are letters to prospective clients.⁵

The other mistaken tradition is the leading role assigned to the eccentric miser John Elwes (d. 1789) as the Adams' principal financier. Early editions of his biography (by Edward Topham) connect him with 'one of the Adams' and mention a 'Mr Adams' as being Elwes's builder up to 1789. Later editions credit Elwes as 'founder' of a 'great part' of Marylebone, including Portland Place. Though ample evidence attests to Elwes's activities as a money-lender to builders in Marylebone, none of the 100-odd conveyances relating to the Adams' 20-year building cycle at Portland Place mentions him and nothing has come to light linking him with it or them directly. However, he did provide a loan to the carpenter James Gibson, who was at the time taking on houses in Portland Place (Topham mentions a 'Mr Gibson' as being Elwes's builder from 1789). And after his death, when Portland Place was finally reaching completion, his sons and co-heirs George and John Elwes made substantial loans to William Adam on the security of houses there, as did one of Elwes's trusted friends and associates, the lawyer Fletcher Partis of Great Titchfield Street.⁶

Early plans: palaces and terraces

Robert Adam's earliest known plans for Portland Place, of c.1772–4, were for two or possibly three large, freestanding mansions. From this fact many writers have inferred that his original intention was for an elongated square in the Continental manner, lined with detached residences far exceeding Foley House at its south end in both size and quality – what the Adam historian Arthur Bolton described as a *strada di palazzi*. The brothers' post-Adelphi financial crisis and the general economic uncertainty created by the American War of Independence from 1775 are cited as the primary

obstructions to this scheme's materialization.⁷ But it is more likely that from the outset Adam was considering a more progressive, integrated development, comprising vast residences of this type intermixed with rows of large terraced houses on Portland Place, all flanked by more modest houses and mews buildings in the narrower streets behind – an advance on Adam's 'mixed' development at the Adelphi. This was certainly what he was already creating in and around Mansfield Street, where Chandos House and General Robert Clerk's mansion rubbed shoulders with two short terraces and mews, and where a colossal palace was planned (though never built) for the Duke of Portland. The Adams were still holding out for detached mansions at Portland Place in 1774–5 – by which time they were also making floor plans for terraces and beginning to sublet plots for them to builders – and again as late as 1789, when much of the development had been completed. Robert Adam's planning of Portland Place emerges from the records as fluid and opportunistic.

The brothers' first building agreement with the Duke of Portland was in October 1767 – before they had embarked upon the Adelphi. Their early focus in Marylebone was at the south-west of their 'take', around Mansfield Street, and there is no evidence of any concrete plans for Portland Place itself until February 1772, when Robert Adam described to Peter Burrell the 'new proposed streets' he envisaged for the area. Towards the end of that year Adam had made two plans of a detached mansion on an impressive scale for James Ogilvy, 7th Earl of Findlater and 4th Earl of Seafield, apparently for a plot of 200ft frontage on the east side of Portland Place, at the south corner of Weymouth Street (now occupied by seven houses at Nos 48–60). The three eldest brothers were already working for Lord Findlater at Cullen House in Banffshire, as their father had done for his father several decades before.⁸

Though lavish in his spending, Findlater was capricious. By December 1773 he had decided not to build the house, only to change his mind again the following year, this time asking for revised designs for a smaller plot,

identified by Bolton as a block with a 160ft frontage south of New Cavendish Street (now Nos 24–32). No drawings survive for these first Findlater schemes but the house – described in Adam’s design invoices as including stable and kitchen offices, a courtyard and garden – may have been in a similar vein to the palatial Palladian edifice he was by then also planning for the 3rd Earl of Kerry (Ill. 17.1), for the adjoining 200ft plot at the north corner with New Cavendish Street (the site of Nos 34–46). Having long since left Ireland, Kerry was at the time flitting between a house in Bath and a recently built mansion on the east side of Portman Square.⁹

By January 1774 Kerry’s Portland Place design was well advanced. The biggest stumbling block was raising money to build the house, estimated by Robert Adam at over £14,000. In their correspondence that year with Kerry, both Robert and James stressed their ‘present pinched situation with regard to money matters’ and asked Kerry for enough hard cash on deposit to enable them to take the work far enough for a mortgage to be raised. Kerry offered £4,000 in bonds but the Adams needed more security. By November 1774, when they began leasing the first terraced sites opposite, James Adam was still hoping they could dig out the foundations and bring materials on site so that construction could begin in the spring. Kerry was ‘still desirous’ of building in 1775, ‘more especially’, he said, as Lord Findlater had stated he would take up his plot if Kerry were to proceed.¹⁰ But nothing ever came of either scheme. Kerry House would have made an imposing addition to Portland Place. Behind its rather sober Palladian frontage were interior suites that displayed Adam’s inventiveness at its best, with interlocking curved rooms, apses and recesses.¹¹

The other possible unbuilt palace of the 1772–4 period was the great town *hôtel* that Robert Adam had designed for the 3rd Duke of Portland, originally for New Cavendish Street (page ###). An early but now lost site plan for Portland Place of c.1773–4, showing the intended sites for Kerry and Findlater Houses, was seen and redrawn by Arthur Bolton and suggests that

by then the brothers had decided to move this mansion to the west side of Portland Place, on the block north of Weymouth Street (now Nos 49–69), presumably turned to face the street.¹²

Few ventures illustrate better the optimism and self-belief of the Adams than their conviction that such extravagant palaces were possible at a time when they were still suffering the after-effects of the 1772 Scottish banking crash, with the Adelphi development stalled, their finances in tatters, and credit in short supply. But their choice of client was unfortunate. The 3rd Duke of Portland lived permanently in debt, his mother the Dowager Duchess having retained control of the family's valuable Cavendish lands. By the early 1780s he was having difficulty raising even a few hundred pounds and in retrospect Adam's designs for him of the 1770s look hopelessly unachievable. Kerry, too, was no stranger to debt and prodigality. Forced to leave Ireland after a controversial marriage to an Irish Catholic divorcee, he lived with her expensively in Surrey, Bath and London before eventually fleeing to exile in Paris in 1775 to escape their creditors.¹³

Findlater, though he abandoned Adam's 1770s plans, was to revive the idea of a freestanding Marylebone townhouse in 1783. Considerable building having taken place on Portland Place in the interim, this was now aimed at a different site – a still-vacant plot further north on the west side, towards the corner with Devonshire Street (in the vicinity of the present Nos 59–63). Adam worked on a series of plans for a mansion of around 97ft frontage, in the lively, more informal neoclassical mode that typified his 'villa' designs of the period, with characteristic features like projecting pedimented end bays with tripartite windows set in relieving arches (Ill. 17.2). But still the Earl demurred. A last, unsuccessful attempt to coax him into building was made in 1789, by which time the builder James Gibson was pressing Adam to let him erect terraced houses on the site. Rumours about Findlater's homosexuality contributed to his departure from Britain soon after for a life of

self-imposed exile on the Continent. An amateur architect, he seemed more at ease building castles on paper or in the air than on the ground.¹⁴

Whilst revising the Kerry and Findlater designs for the east side of Portland Place in the mid 1770s, Robert Adam also began sketching out rough plans for very large terraced houses to stand on the west side – one for an extravagant ‘Center House’ of 78ft, another for a group of three on the 160ft-wide block between Duchess and New Cavendish Streets, later worked up as a set of finished floor plans by the Adam drawing office.¹⁵ Here Adam intended a double-fronted house of 60ft frontage, with a porticoed entrance, flanked by corner houses of 50ft. Like the Kerry House scheme they show him experimenting with intricate layouts and varied room shapes. The corner houses, for instance, have ‘double’ drawing rooms but the front one is rectangular, the other circular and leading via a small, round passage or ante-room to a rear private suite of bedchamber, dressing and powdering rooms, and a closet. Everywhere are curved forms – ovals, circles, apses, niches, sinuous corridors. The drawings must date from before September 1774, when this block was finally subdivided into narrower plots of just over 30ft frontage, which became standard for Portland Place, and let to builders. In the end five such houses were built here (Nos 17–25). Though Adam’s large terraced mansions never left the drawing board, elements of their lively plan-forms filtered down into the first phase of houses built in Portland Place, especially those on corner sites (see Ill. 17.6).

Chronology of development

Excluding their earlier work in and around Mansfield Street, begun c.1768 (page ##), the first houses developed under the Adams in Portland Place were nine in a row on Harley Street (later Nos 44–60), at the corner with New Cavendish Street. Leased to the bricklayer John Winstanley in September

1772, they were largely complete by 1775, when the Adams assigned their interest to Sir William Chambers (see page ##).¹⁶ Their first agreement with the Duke of Portland of October 1767 covered ground north and to either side of Foley House, extending west as far as Harley Street and east to Great Portland Street (see Ill. 17.3). More plots from this take were leased by the Adams early in 1773 in Little Queen Anne (later Langham) Street, Chapel Mews and Duke (now the southern end of Hallam) Street, near the Portland Chapel. There then followed a hiatus of over a year. From February 1774 they were issuing leases again, to builders on Great Portland Street and Chapel Row (later Gildea Street).¹⁷

The first sign of activity in Portland Place itself came in November 1774 to March 1775, when the block comprising the present Nos 17–25 was leased to the Adams and divided by them into parcels of around 32ft frontage for subletting to tradesmen. By September 1775, Nos 13, 15, 22 and 24–30 had followed suit; and by the end of the following year leases had been agreed for all the houses on Portland Place as far north as Weymouth Street, in the associated mews, and also in much of Charlotte (now part of Hallam) Street and Great Portland Street.¹⁸ This bout of conveyancing might suggest that construction was in full swing but there is scant evidence of much fabric being completed on the ground until 1777, when the first Portland Place residences (Nos 13 and 20) were finished and occupied. Many houses in these early blocks stood incomplete and unremunerative for several years – even decades. For example, No. 19, leased to the plasterer Joseph Rose in 1775, was not finished and tenanted (by Lord Lisburne) until 1783; and No. 30 remained in the hands of the builder James Swinton at a reduced rate until it was finally completed and rented to Munbee Goulburn in 1793. The chronology suggests that, contrary to standard practice, the Adams were issuing leases well before houses had been completed – maybe even before they were begun. Though much work still remained to be done, the Duke of Portland seems to have had

no qualms about signing a second agreement with the Adams in April 1776 to take on the upper parts of Portland Place, north of Weymouth Street.¹⁹

Another factor in this early phase, of 1774–7, was a piece of ground in Portland Place in which the Adams apparently held no legal interest. The row of six houses at Nos 34–44, along with the adjoining frontages to New Cavendish Street and Charlotte Street, were built under Portland Estate leases distributed by a different ‘brotherhood’ of migrant Scots contractors, Hepburn and James Hastie (see Ill. 17.3).²⁰ Unlike the loyalist Whig Adam family, the Hasties seem to have been Jacobite sympathisers, having fled with their father Archibald to France after the ‘45. They were in London by 1760 and eventually established themselves in Marylebone as carpenters and builders. They were also active on the Berners estate. Their role in this corner of Portland Place seems surprising given that it was part of one of the two long, principal terraces, finished with a regular *palazzo* façade of brick and stucco to Adam designs. The two families no doubt had some private arrangement, though no evidence of this has come to light. Elsewhere around Portland Place they acted together as co-developers, and the Hasties also took leases of other plots from the Adams and operated as builders in the usual way. It was probably through their association with the Adams, or with the architect Robert Nasmith, an important figure in the Adam office, that the Hasties also later worked as building contractors in the 1790s on the farm and stables at Kenwood House.²¹

As well as the Hasties, other tradesmen were on occasion co-parties with the Adams in their subleases to builders, particularly in this early phase, and most commonly for plots in streets where they were already heavily engaged themselves. Of these, the carver Thomas Nicholl, the plasterer Anthony Maderni and the painter and glazier David Williams were foremost.²² A few entrepreneurs took large blocks of land from the Adams and acted as ‘mini-developers’, subletting plots themselves. Sir William Chambers’s brother John, then living in Great Marlborough Street, took the

block at Nos 27–41, and William Ward, who witnessed many deeds on behalf of the Adams, had big plots on both sides, at Nos 43–47 and 34–60. Also prominent as builders on Portland Place itself were Thomas and James Gibson, originally of Westminster but latterly based in Marylebone. James Gibson seems to have been influential in the latter stages, by which time he had become builder of choice to John Elwes.²³

More Portland Place leases, for the first plots in the terraces north of Weymouth Street, followed in 1778, though by then still only three houses in the whole street had been fully rated and occupied. This had risen to nineteen by 1780 and to twenty-six by 1782.²⁴ But further progress in the northern parts was now painfully slow in what was a notably fallow and difficult period for the Adams (see *Finance*, below). They issued only a handful of new leases – around seven – in the six years between 1782 and 1788, and these mostly in Charlotte (Hallam), Devonshire and Weymouth Streets. It was not until 1789–91 that they were able to dispose of their remaining Portland Place plots, at Nos 63–75 and 66–84, and several of these leases were in fact taken by William Adam, presumably in an attempt to encourage builders to follow suit. (The Adams used a similar ploy at Fitzroy Square, their final London speculation.)²⁵ The last conveyance from the Portland Estate to the Adams, for property in Devonshire Street and Devonshire Mews, came in November 1792, several months after Robert Adam’s death, and the final transfer of land from James Adam to a builder followed in January 1793. William Adam was still mortgaging houses in an around Portland Place in 1794. Even then six houses (Nos 67, 69, 72 and 82–86) remained unfinished, of which No. 84 was incomplete in 1798 and was still listed as in William Adam & Co.’s hands in 1801.²⁶

The brothers’ second Portland Estate agreement, of 1776, allowed them 5¾ years in which to finish all the houses, by Christmas 1782, and it is likely that the first agreement would have contained a similar stipulation. Yet there is no sign of the Duke of Portland taking any penalizing action for the long

delays. Being short of funds he was perhaps content enough to watch money roll in; for the Adams had tied themselves by that second agreement to a system of steeply escalating ground rents, paying only £57 15s for the northern grounds for the first year, rising to £147 by the third, and finally to £857 2s for the fifth and thereafter. Again, it is likely the first agreement was comparable and this no doubt explains the unpaid debts to the Duke mentioned in their correspondence in both 1777 and 1787.²⁷ Perhaps also the Adams' cause was helped by the calming influence of young William (d.1839) – John Adam's son, nephew to the three London-based brothers and a trusted adviser of the Duke's – who being based in the capital became embroiled on his father's behalf in the increasingly tense and bitter negotiations about the family's financial difficulties.

Finance

The hiatus between James Adam's negotiations with the Duke of Portland in 1767 and work beginning on the terraces in Mansfield Street and Portland Place in the 1770s is explained by the Adams' ambitious development at the Adelphi, begun in 1768, which was a constant drain on resources, even after the private lottery sale of 1774 that temporarily steadied their finances.

Some separation seems to have existed between the two ventures in respect to expenditure, at least initially. The Portland Estate agreement was made by James Adam on behalf of his and his brother Robert's architectural practice as their own speculation, whereas the Adelphi was undertaken in association with their brothers John and William under the umbrella of the family's contracting and building supplies firm (William Adam & Company, founded 1764), in which they all held equal shares. Robert and James kept a separate account with Drummond's Bank for their architectural partnership and to begin with guarded its distinction from 'company' business jealously.

Financial arrangements at Portland Place are obscured by a gradual commingling and confusion of accounts and responsibilities, and by William Adam's habit of continually moving items in or out of the company statements that he prepared for his brother John in Scotland. According to William, when building got under way in Marylebone and prospects were good, the company took on a few houses there as a speculation (i.e. Chandos House and Nos 15 and 22 Mansfield Street, for which Robert and James had retained the leases); this explains their inclusion in the company's Adelphi lottery sale a few years later. But when the development stalled and those houses seemed likely to make a loss, Robert and James apparently transferred their profits from the Marylebone ground rents to help shore up the company accounts. Later still, with the 'great falling off' in Robert and James's architectural business, the roles must have been reversed, as by the 1780s they stood greatly in the company's debt. To further complicate matters, as in Mansfield Street the company also took on the construction of houses in Portland Place in its early phase: No. 17, at the corner with Duchess Street; and Nos 37 and 46–48, the prominent central houses in the main terrace ranges.²⁸

The Adams made good use of mortgages to raise money on their Marylebone interests. The three big stuccoed houses at the centre of the development (Nos 37 and 46–48) were mortgaged in 1777–8 to William Denne, a banker in the Strand with whom the Adams enjoyed good relations. Denne was still awaiting repayment in October 1785. Their other Portland Place house, No. 17, they mortgaged to their sisters Jenny, Helen, Betty and Peggy. (When William Adam went bankrupt in 1817, long after his other brothers were dead, his largest creditors were Betty and Peggy).²⁹

Money for Portland Place was also raised through the habitual use of a risky form of short-term, unsecured loan known as a penal bond. This entitled the lender to recoup double its nominal value should the borrower default in his or her interest or final payments. One such bond, of 1775, for a loan of

£1,000 to be repaid in six months, was with their close associate the plasterer Joseph Rose, who had received only £200 in part payment six years later and by 1786 was threatening legal proceedings.³⁰

In addition, the Adams advanced money to tradesmen who had taken leases in Portland Place, to help get building going, and set money aside for the construction of the company's own houses. At the same time they also settled some of their own debts in kind, for example providing materials and labour for Joseph Rose's houses in Portland Place.³¹

A general upturn in building in 1773–7 allowed the Adams to make headway in Portland Place, and over the same period they amassed £100,000 or more from their various activities. But the economy took a sudden downturn from 1778 when France entered the American War of Independence, severely squeezing credit. By April 1779 William was reporting 'a very disagreeable pinch for money' and struggled to explain to John in Scotland that all those gains had been wiped out 'by the Loss of the Buildings built on Speculation' and by other debts.³²

By the spring of 1785, when progress on Portland Place had virtually ceased, William's figures showed the brothers to be at their lowest ebb. Bankruptcy now seemed inevitable and, had it come, would have been welcomed by John, to whom the other three were heavily indebted, to the tune of around £50,000. By October that year they had begun to sell their Portland Place houses at a loss in order to raise cash to clear some of the company's liabilities.³³

Eventually, in 1794, with Portland Place stuttering to its finish, John's son William took on a large part of his uncles James's and William's remaining debts and gave up his father's claim to the enormous sum they owed him. But this was not an end of it. After James's death, young William helped his uncle William procure further loans, mostly relating to the Adam company's contract for work at the wet docks at the Isle of Dogs. Debts and

creditors were to haunt William Adam until his inevitable bankruptcy in 1817 and suicide in Welbeck Street in 1822.³⁴

Design and planning

Only one exterior design for Portland Place survives among the 9,000 or so Adam office drawings in Sir John Soane's Museum: an elevation of a terrace, unsigned and undated, but generally and incorrectly associated with James Adam (Ill. 17.4).³⁵ It shows the block now numbered 27–47 on the west side, north of New Cavendish Street, the plots for which were leased to builders in 1775–6. Curiously, both Arthur Bolton and James Lees-Milne dismissed this drawing as unexecuted, claiming that the terrace it showed was too long for Portland Place and the houses too large in scale.³⁶ Yet its extent, at 400ft, matches exactly what was built, as does the number of houses indicated (eleven), their frontages (generally around 32–33ft), and also their architectural style and details, barring a few modifications – principally the substitution of Corinthian for Ionic capitals to the pilasters of the central stuccoed house, and the omission of the stucco, relieving arches and round windows from the 'pavilion' houses at either end. It was this drawing's architectural language – the counterbalancing of stucco and brick façades; the occasional use of giant order pilasters, pediments and rustication; balustraded parapets; simple door openings with pretty fanlights; and the shallow advancing or receding of certain houses – that was to be adapted and repeated by the Adams on the various blocks of Portland Place. For instance, the other main terrace opposite, at Nos 34–60, is similar, but there the five stuccoed and decorated central bays are shared between two houses (Nos 46 and 48, see Ill. 17.30). The shorter, earlier terraces at Nos 17–25 and 24–32 had Ionic stucco pilasters and pediments applied to their three central bays; whereas the later groups at Nos 49–69, 62–84, 71–75 and 86–90 had them

spread across five. Also, at Nos 49–69 the stuccoed end houses had pilasters but no pediments, whilst opposite at 62–84 the reverse was the case (Ills 17.5, 17.64). The degree of Adam involvement at this later, northern end of the street has in the past been questioned, but all the builders there were required to sign articles of agreement with Robert, James and William Adam, and to decorate the fronts of their houses with ‘stone or other ornaments’ as shown on drawings supplied by them.³⁷ Stylistically, Portland Place represents a development of the linear architecture of the Adams’ earlier palace-fronted terrace schemes at the Adelphi and Mansfield Street, treading a path between the decorativeness of the former and the astylar simplicity of the latter.³⁸

The rhythm created by the use of stuccoed and sometimes pedimented centre or end houses within a long brick terrace was soon picked up and repeated elsewhere, most notably in Bedford Square, on the Duke of Bedford’s Bloomsbury estate, where the building chronology, though very similar to that at Portland Place, was less affected by the American war due to the remedial action of the estate steward Robert Palmer, who lent money to the builders to expedite its completion.³⁹

At least some of the stucco used at Portland Place was said to have been Liardet’s – for which the Adams had famously secured a patent – but if so this is likely to apply only to the earliest Portland Place houses, as they claimed to have ceased using his defective formula on their own buildings from 1779, following several high-profile and expensive failures – though they were happy to keep selling it to others. A letter in the *Public Advertiser* in 1777 commended the ‘new Stucco’ at Portland Place ‘as elegant as Marble itself’. Fifty years later James Elmes said it had ‘perished to the core’, comparing it unfavourably with the Roman cement on James Wyatt’s house in Foley Place, which Elmes thought would endure, like ‘the finest stone’.⁴⁰

In its layout, the Adam development continued the grid type of street plan that had characterized this area of Marylebone since the 1720s. But there was considerable difference in the size and shape of the various blocks of the

grid and also the house plots within them. The inclusion of Mansfield Street, for instance, greatly reduced the depth of some plots on the west side of Portland Place (see Ill. 17.3).

As for their internal layout, the Portland Place houses could be regarded as standard in their general adherence to the side-passage plan, with a suite of interconnecting first-floor drawing rooms, albeit on a generous scale. But this would be to overlook the variety and novelty that Robert Adam was able to create within that form. Corner houses often had side entrances, enabling a more imaginative layout of the main reception rooms. Shallower plots naturally forced a greater concentration in planning; deeper or wider plots gave him a chance to experiment with more rooms. Although these houses were ostensibly individual speculations, there were far too many subtleties of layout – for example octagonal rooms, or curved walls with curved chimneypieces to match – for their design to be the work of a speculative builder. This suggests the Adams were providing not just elevations but also plans of some sort for most of the houses.

Most of the surviving Adam office drawings for interiors at Portland Place date from 1775–7 and relate only to the earlier stretches of houses at the southern end of the street, on both sides, i.e. Nos 17–25, 27–37 and 24–48. Robert Adam’s ceiling designs here show him developing increasingly complex geometrical frameworks – such as repeated or overlaid circles, or interlocking curves and lozenges – onto which he grafted decorative neoclassical motifs in a seemingly endless array of combinations, along with sculptural plaques and Zucchi-esque painted panels of classical scenes (see Ill. 17.56). As for colour, a warmish pale green is the predominant tone in these ceiling drawings, offset by bursts of cream, purple, and cooler greens and blues – though occasionally a range of blues takes over and dominates entire ceilings, as in the Adams’ own speculation at No. 37 (Ill. 17.7). Whether these

colours were ever applied to the ceilings in question is difficult to say. Adam also designed scores of friezes to match, customarily producing different frieze designs for each of the principal rooms in a house (Ill. 17.8).⁴¹

A question mark still hangs over the authorship of some of the ceiling designs at Portland Place. For certain houses where no Adam office drawings survive there are sketches by the plasterer Joseph Rose junior (whose sketchbook is now in the collection at Harewood House). These include detailed drawings of the front and back first-floor drawing room ceilings at No. 46 – one of the important pair of central stuccoed houses on the east side. The back room ceiling drawing is labelled ‘Mr Rose’s Desine’, that for the front room as ‘Old Mr Roses’s Desine’, referring to Joseph Rose senior (d. 1780). These ceilings look Adamesque, if perhaps a little busy and less elegantly arranged (see Ill. 17.34). Rose junior seems also to have designed most of the ceilings in the block not leased to the Adams, at Nos 34–44.⁴²

With chimneypieces, too, the variety of design is remarkable, often with as many as four or five marble pieces being provided for the major rooms of each house. The use of timber in some fireplaces, relatively common at the Adelphi, seems rare in Portland Place, reflecting its intended grandeur. Some pieces were of exceptional elaboration, given the speculative nature of the houses – such as those of c.1766 with delicate coloured and inlaid marble, intended for the front drawing rooms at No. 43 and at Joseph Rose’s house at No. 34 (Ill. 17.9).

The sheer amount of decorative variety across such a large building speculation is remarkable, and typical of Adam’s love of novelty, but there was some repetition. Drawings labelled ‘Chimney Piece for the Halls in Portland Place’ suggest generic designs being used in more than one location, as do Joseph Rose’s drawings of plasterwork details, such as overdoors and friezes annotated: ‘Done in Severall Houses in Portland Place’.⁴³

In addition to the elaborate interiors he was designing for these speculative houses, Robert Adam also provided additional bespoke fixtures

and fittings for early residents once they had acquired a lease. The exquisite coloured inlaid chimneypiece with a gilt overmantel mirror he designed for Mrs Cornwall at No. 17 in 1783 is a particularly fine example (see Ill. 17.54).

Early social character

There was no truth to the assertion in the London press in January 1777, prior to any houses being finished, that the Prince of Wales – then not 15 years old – had purchased the large ‘center’ mansion in Portland Place (presumably meaning No. 37). The Adams must have been delighted the following year to sell this house (the biggest in the street) to David Murray, Viscount Stormont, nephew and heir to the 1st Earl Mansfield, their great supporter and patron at Kenwood. Stormont was said to have spent ten thousand guineas on the house, which had already been mortgaged by the Adams for £5,000.⁴⁴ Soon other notable and fashionable residents followed in 1779: General Thomas Gage, returned from the American War of Independence, at No. 41; Colonel (later 2nd Earl) Harcourt at No. 23; Edwin, 2nd Baron Sandys at No. 26; Lady Sara Archer, beloved of satirists and cartoonists for her passion for rouge and gambling, at No. 25; then, in quick succession in 1780–5, the Marquis of Lothian and George Townshend, Lord Ferrers (later Earl of Leicester) at No. 31. Residents by 1801 included nine peers or their wives, and seven knights.

General Sir Henry Clinton, Bt, at No. 21 from 1785, was with Gage, one of several early residents connected with the American Revolutionary wars. As well as the aristocrats and soldiers, foreign dignitaries and representatives also took houses here from early on, such as Prince Starhemberg, ambassador to the Emperor Francis II of Austria, who was renting No. 34 from Joseph Rose in the 1790s and early 1800s.⁴⁵

Despite the Adams’ financial problems, the street was regarded as ‘elegant and superb’ even in the early 1780s, before it had been finished, and

soon established itself as one of the most fashionable streets in the capital. A rather silly story in the press about a newly married wife striking her husband on the pate with a poker made this point, as the source of their quarrel was his taking a house in Berkeley Square, whereas she insisted Portland Place was far 'more the *ton*'.⁴⁶

Naturally, where there was fashion, title and international diplomacy, there was also extravagant wealth. The merchant banker and antiquary Richard Muilman Trench Chiswell owned a house here in the 1790s. But Sir John Hadley D'Oyly, 6th Bt, of D'Oyly Park, Hampshire, first resident at No. 51 from 1786 perhaps serves as the best example, having newly returned from East India Company service in Murshidabad, where he had been British resident in 1779–85, with a fortune garnered there conservatively estimated at £80,000.⁴⁷

Portland Place from c.1800

The earliest views, of around 1800 – such as that by Malton published in *Picturesque Rides* (Ill. 17.10) – show the development complete and unadulterated. Also noticeable are throngs of people taking the air, something that was apparently a feature of Portland Place in the days before it became a through road:

This grand place was remarkable for its peaceful dignity and undisturbed character. In it few sounds were heard, except those emanating from the wheels of private carriages. During the fashionable season, after dinner, in the twilight of a fine evening, it was not unusual to see parties, slowly walking up and down; enjoying the fresh air, with no further addition to their evening costume than a round hat for

gentlemen, the ladies with an immense lace veil loosely thrown over their head and shoulders.⁴⁸

One of the fears expressed by residents about John Nash's accepted proposals for the new route to Regent's Park in the 1810s was the potentially damaging effect of through traffic, especially the kind of bucolic 'through traffic' habitually found on the New (now Marylebone) Road. In the event, though the brick walls, railings and gates erected by the Adams at the top of the street for the Duke of Portland were removed to allow access to Park Crescent, new gates and lodges on either side of the New Road kept the carts and drovers away (see also Chapter 20). It was not until the era of motor transport, when the London County Council's dislike of gated streets saw Portland Place opened up to charabanc drivers en route to the Great North Road, that the noise and inconvenience of through traffic became a concern for potential lessees.⁴⁹

Architecturally, rather than being undermined by the addition of Regent Street, Langham Place and Park Crescent, the Adams' work at Portland Place became an integral part of one of the grandest city improvements in Europe. James Elmes thought Nash had joined his 'broad' style to the 'finicking finish' of the Adams to 'good effect'.⁵⁰ And socially, things carried on much as before. In fact, the Regency period perhaps marks the zenith of Portland Place's rise to fashion, especially in the heady days of 1815–18 following Napoleon's fall from power, when the Spanish Ambassador (then installed in a house belonging to Lord Shaftesbury) held balls for over 800 people in honour of the Russian and French Court and ambassadors, and heads of the British forces. Gout prevented the Prince Regent from attending, but he was in such good spirits at a similar event at the new Prussian Ambassador's house in Portland Place in the spring of 1818 that, 'after the cloth was removed' he sang two songs, 'in a pleasing and scientific style'.⁵¹ Chateaubriand resided in Portland Place in 1822 as French

Ambassador, again in Lord Shaftesbury's house, which was also later occupied by the Chinese Legation (No. 49, demolished).⁵²

Since 1850

The unity and subtle variations of the Adam façades began to disappear in the 1850s with piecemeal alterations such as the raising of upper storeys or the wholesale use of channelled stucco at ground-floor level to imitate stone. The pace of change intensified in the 1860s and especially the 1870s, when first leases began to fall in, and in accordance with the Portland Estate's policy it became *de rigueur* for new lessees to install new windows, to add first-floor balconies, renew fanlights and rebuild stables and coach-houses. Entrance porticoes, frequently in an overly heavy Doric or Grecian style, also became popular (see Ills 17.26, 17.65). But the years around 1870 were marked mostly by the raising of front walls to create an extra storey. Pilasters were extended (beyond the crowning balustrade if it survived) by squat little additions, and pediments were taken down and re-installed above the new storey, but the Adam brothers' carefully judged proportions were lost (see Ill. 17.??).⁵³

Redevelopment with new houses on a similar if not grander scale to the Adam buildings was still feasible in the 1870s, as at No. 69 (1871–2) and No. 1 (1879). But social change was coming. In 1886 the *London World* remarked on the 'portent' of as many as eleven Portland Place houses standing empty. Mr Warren de la Rue and Mr Raphael might continue to 'rival each other in the splendour of their window blinds and flower pots', but the old mandarins and great statesmen were gone or going.⁵⁴ By 1908 half the street's leases were said to be in agents' hands. Few people could afford the upkeep of such properties, and even those who could were now said to prefer 'a flat and a motor car and the facility for going abroad without the worry of keeping an establishment of 12 servants'. An 'unprecedented' depression in

the high-class property market followed in the early 1900s and continued into the mid 1920s, marking a low point in Portland Place for the sale of Adam houses – nearly fifty were on the market in 1924. Gerald Ellis, who had inherited No. 29 from his father in 1907, considered dropping his price from £7,500 to £4,000 and accepting £3,500.⁵⁵

Hard-pressed owners sought to sell up to developers for conversion to apartments or medical consultancies. But the Howard de Walden Estate was adamant that Portland Place must remain a premier residential address and refused such applications if for more than two maisonettes or professional practices. At the time, developers regarded anything less than three or four as uneconomical. And so in order to maintain the street's social character, estate policy was to encourage demolition of the grand Adam houses for rebuilding with blocks of high-class flats – something it would have been happy to oversee 'right through the Street'. Even Nos 46–48, the stuccoed jewel at the centre of the best Adam range at 34–60, was a property of which Colonel Blount, the Estate Surveyor, said in 1930 he should 'much prefer to deal with ... as a building site'.⁵⁶

Flats had begun to appear in the street in the 1890s, but as elsewhere in the area came to the fore in the early years of the twentieth century. Two of around 1910 by Frank T. Verity (Nos 11A–B, demolished, and Nos 70–74) exhibited his skill and first-hand knowledge of Beaux-Arts neoclassicism from his spell of training in Paris. Later blocks grew ever larger and more domineering and tended to congregate towards the upper end of the street (Nos 73 and 82–84, 1920s; Nos 55, 71, 86 and 88–90, 1930s). Several in Portland Place were connected with bullish developers like Lord Waring and the Peczeniks, father and son.

With flats came an influx of commercial and professional middle classes, and nouveaux riches. It is to a flat 'near Portland Place' that Richard Hannay, a mining engineer who has made his fortune in South Africa, returns in John Buchan's *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915) but he quickly tires of the

vacuity of the associated lifestyle. (Buchan himself lived in a flat at 76 Portland Place with his young family from 1912 till 1919.)⁵⁷ But even developers of flats began to find the going tough by the 1930s. New apartments at Nos 55 and 71 were not letting several months after their completion, prompting the Howard de Walden Estate to allow a maisonette at No. 55 to be converted to consulting suites for doctors, to encourage take-up. The trend coincided with a growing tendency for businesses to gravitate from the City towards the West End, bringing added pressure for commercial lets.⁵⁸

As early as the mid 1890s, with so many houses empty, the Howard de Walden Estate had allowed small numbers of medical men of 'very high standing' to practise in Portland Place. Gradually, suitable institutions were also allowed to take up leases, many of them with medical connections. Purely commercial offices, shops and banks, however, were not wanted by London County Council's planners, who had already zoned the area for residential and institutional use. But the presence of the BBC, at Portland Place from 1932 and expanding rapidly, followed shortly afterwards by the RIBA, turned the tide. Two office proposals refused by the LCC in 1938-9 won a reprieve at appeal because the Minister of Health judged the BBC had already greatly changed the street's character.⁵⁹

War damage, military requisitioning and general poor maintenance made Portland Place even less of a draw for private owners after 1945. Writing shortly afterwards, Harold Clunn admired the recent blocks of flats but thought the old houses 'dark and gloomy' and unlikely to be regretted if demolished for taller, 'more ornate' buildings, which he thought would make Portland Place 'a more worthy continuation of Regent Street'.⁶⁰ Post-war building restrictions and shortage of money probably did more than anything else to prevent further redevelopment, but nevertheless the period prior to listing in the 1950s-70s was marked by some terrible treatment of the historic fabric during conversion to other uses. Many interiors have now been refurbished and restored for diplomatic or office use, or as meetings or

entertainment rooms for corporate or private hire. And, as in Mansfield Street, a few Adam houses have now come full circle and are being reconverted back to single family occupation.

Trees and Statues

The London plane trees that run down the centre of Portland Place lend it much of its Continental flavour and create a visual link with the verdancy of Regent's Park beyond. They have an air of permanence but their presence is a surprisingly recent one. The idea had been mooted by Marylebone Council in the 1870s and again later but was not universally popular. Lady Howard de Walden was opposed to it, and some residents thought the effect would be too 'suburban-like' for such a dignified street. A further airing in 1922–3 won a more favourable response but it was not until the 1970s or 80s that the planting of trees was finally accepted by all interested parties.⁶¹

As well as its trees, the central 'island' of Portland Place is home to a series of commemorative statues ranging in date from the early 1900s to the present century. From south to north these are as follows:

Quintin Hogg (1845–1903). An accomplished group composition of 1906 by Sir George Frampton, showing the seated figure of Hogg reading to two boys. This bronze was moved here in April–May 1933 from its original site in Langham Place, close to Hogg's Polytechnic (see Ill. 19/9), where it was beginning to interfere with the traffic constable's view of vehicles coming up Regent Street. The stone pedestal also commemorates Hogg's wife Alice (d. 1918) as well as members of the Polytechnic killed in the two world wars.⁶²

Field Marshal Sir George Stuart White (1835–1912). A life-size equestrian bronze figure of the veteran of the Afghan and Boer Wars, best known for his role in the siege of Ladysmith (Ill. 17/11). By John Tweed, 1922.⁶³

General Wladyslaw Sikorski (1881–1943), Commander-in-Chief of Polish forces and prime minister in exile during the Second World War. This large memorial statue by Faith Winter was unveiled in 2000 on an island at the corner with Weymouth Street, close to the Polish Embassy, by the Duke of Kent (see Ill. 17/63). It also commemorates Polish servicemen and resistance fighters.⁶⁴

Joseph, Lord Lister (1827–1912), by Sir Thomas Brock, comprising a large bronze bust on a stone plinth, with a supporting allegorical figure of Humanity. Work was delayed by the First World War, and Brock died in 1922 before finishing Humanity, which was completed by his assistant F. Arnold Wright. Cast by the Morris Art Bronze Foundry and unveiled in 1924.⁶⁵

For Edward Augustus, Duke of Kent in Park Crescent, see page ##.

East Side

At the south end, the dominant presence today is the BBC's much-enlarged New Broadcasting House complex. The earliest houses here were a pair of c.1777–81, latterly numbered 20 and 22 – the southernmost of those built for the Adam brothers' development, situated between the south corner with Duchess Street and the gardens of Foley House. Their first occupants were respectively Josiah Dupré in 1778 and Sir Peter Blake, Bt, in 1782.⁶⁶ Later residents here included Sir Marcus Samuel (Lord Bearsted) at No. 20, founder of the Shell Transport & Trading Company, which by the early 1900s was handling most of the oil being shipped out of the Suez Canal; and Thomas FitzGerald at No. 22, whose wife was a close friend of the poet Robert Browning, who stayed there on occasion.⁶⁷

Other than James Wyatt's home and office of 1774, built on part of the grounds of Foley House (Foley Place, page ##), no other houses stood south

of this point until the demolition of Foley House by John Nash in the mid 1810s to link Portland Place with Regent Street via the curved route of Langham Place. The houses that Nash built on this east side of Langham Place were on a more advanced line of frontage than Portland Place to their north, in which they were later numbered as Nos 2-6 and 10-18 (Foley Place was No. 8); all are discussed on pages ###-###.

Broadcasting House

Commanding the chicane that links Portland Place to Regent Street, Broadcasting House is the pale, ethereal Pollux to the Langham Hotel's earthy Castor. Opened in 1932, the original Broadcasting House has since 2012 formed the south-west wing of an extensively rebuilt and extended New Broadcasting House (Ill. 17/12) – a spanner-head in plan, occupying the whole site bounded by Portland Place, Duchess Street, Hallam Street and All Souls Place, and swallowing up the western arm of Langham Street.

It was built at a time of rapid development in broadcasting. 'Wireless telephony' had been used only for experimental or military purposes until 1920, when the first regular radio broadcasts in Britain were had made from a hut at the Marconi Company's aircraft division at Writtle in Essex, augmented later the same year by transmission from Marconi House on the Strand. As licences proliferated, the Postmaster-General, who had responsibility for licensing all forms of mass communication other than newspapers, orchestrated a collaborative venture by the principal wireless manufacturers in an attempt to avoid the anarchy of the airwaves in the United States, where competing transmitters were going up unconstrained. In October 1922 six of the principal wireless-equipment manufacturers – Marconi, British Thomson-Houston, Metropolitan Vickers, General Electric, Radio Communication and Western Electric – floated the British Broadcasting Company Ltd, which was

to have two years' exclusive broadcasting rights in the UK. They appointed a 33-year-old engineer, John Reith, as general manager, with offices in General Electric's premises at Magnet House in the Strand. The output was news reports, weather, and vocal and instrumental concerts, to be supplemented later by 'speeches written by popular people'. In 1923–4 Reith consolidated the company's broadcasting and office functions at buildings occupied by the Institution of Electrical Engineers in Savoy Hill and Savoy Place.⁶⁸

By 1925 consideration was being given as to whether the company should be incorporated to guard against a US-style free-for-all. In March 1926 the Parliamentary Crawford Committee recommended that broadcasting remain a monopoly 'controlled by a single authority', and that the British Broadcasting Company be taken over as a government-controlled and non-commercial British Broadcasting Commission. This duly happened in January 1927, with a change of name to Corporation, reflecting establishment by royal charter, not statute, so as to demonstrate that the BBC was not 'a creature of Parliament and connected with political activity'.⁶⁹

By then the GPO had issued 2.18 million receiving licences, the BBC was employing nearly 800 staff, and transmission had expanded from Marconi House via the roof of Selfridge's to a country-wide network. But studio provision at Savoy Hill was still makeshift and inadequate, and in the context of this growth and its imminent new status, the BBC towards the end of 1926 asked Marmaduke Tudsbury Tudsbury, its recently appointed civil engineer, to find 'any sites or interesting buildings' that might serve as new offices and studios.⁷⁰

Tudsbury spent the whole of 1927 looking for sites, exploring more than twenty and leaving 'no stone unturned'. One of the first he saw was that eventually chosen in Portland Place, then on offer for £140,000 – beyond what the infant Corporation was willing to spend; also some thought the site 'too far north'. Tudsbury was particularly taken with Dorchester House on Park Lane, with its 'great staircase of white marble ... the chief apartments

spacious and lofty'. Other sites seriously considered and rejected included part of the Adam brothers' Adelphi development off the Strand, and Bush House, Aldwych, later to become the home of the BBC's World Service. Most seriously developed was a scheme for the Grosvenor House site in Mayfair, for which Wimperis, Simpson & Guthrie, architects to the Grosvenor Estate, were asked to prepare plans for a concert hall with studios and offices.⁷¹

Portland Place was decided on in July 1928. Having been rejected by the BBC in 1927, the site was acquired from its owner, Lord Waring (who had bought the freehold from the Howard de Walden estate), by a syndicate of developers fronted by Robert Solomon, senior partner in the City solicitors Montagu's and Cox & Cardale and a leading Zionist, chairman of the Jewish National Fund in the 1930s and later advisor on Jewish affairs in Germany in the immediate aftermath of the war.⁷² The other syndicate members were: Anthony Haldin Stein Caro, the stockbroker father of the sculptor Anthony Caro; his uncle, the barrister Henry Hyman Haldin (formerly Haldin Stein), an authority on Stock Exchange law; and a larger-than-life estate agent, J. A. Phillips. A scheme had already been formulated for the site comprising a block of flats above ground-floor shops, designed by the architect George Val Myer and his partner F. J. Watson-Hart. Myer, a member of the well-known 'Myer's Beds' family, was a former pupil of John Belcher, architect to the same syndicate for Portsoken House, an office development in the Minories.⁷³

The site, created when John Nash devised the short stretch of Langham Place to align Portland Place with his Regent Street improvement, was unusually shaped and awkward, especially at its curving south end (see Ill. 19/7, pages ###, ###). At the time of the syndicate's acquisition it comprised several late Georgian and Regency houses, at 2-8 Portland Place and 1-5 Langham Street, including James Wyatt's house and architectural office (Foley House or Place, page ###). About a third of the site was an open forecourt. Myer's original perspective of 1927 (known because of its shape as the 'Top Hat' design) was blocky, featuring American-style setbacks, with

only the ground-floor shopfronts running along the curving building line, the irregular south end smoothed into a semi-circle to house a bank (Ill. 17.13). The syndicate, aware of the Corporation's previous interest in the site, then began wooing them as potential tenants.⁷⁴

The BBC's Governors, concerned at the cost and inflexibility of adapting any of the various buildings viewed by Tudsbery, were warming to the Portland Place site. Val Myer and Tudsbery were instructed to produce a joint report with plans for the BBC, on the understanding that something 'less severe' than the Top Hat design (which Myer had shown them in March 1928) would be preferred. Their report, of July 1928, outlined a scheme for 60,000 sq. ft of accommodation for the Corporation, with the possibility of further expansion into an additional 40,000 sq. ft. This proposal, in appearance still recognizably the 'Top Hat' design, was essentially for a building within a building (Ill. 17.14). At its core was a studio-tower – an irregular rectangle in plan, wider at its north end, and topped by a double-height 'super studio', all wrapped around by floors of offices to accommodate 750 staff. On the ground floor only the east, Langham Street side was to be used by the BBC, with the rest let as a bank, in a semi-circular frontage to Langham Place, and shops in a shallow but symmetrical curved frontage to Portland Place. Staff and artistes' entrances were to be at either end. When it came to the type of shops, the Chief Engineer favoured a hairdressing salon, with special terms for staff, 'as this is a constant and expensive necessity for girls... what I want to avoid', he said, 'is a Woolworth's store, or other undesirable tenants'. The first and second floors were to be let off as office space until required by the BBC. One feature of the revised design generally disliked was its irregular outline, cut away in a steep glissade on its Langham Street side to respect the right to light of Sir John Ellerman's Audley Trust property on Langham Street, especially Cavendish Mansions. This undoubtedly compromised what was intended as the prime view up Regent Street, though the lop-sidedness was partly concealed by a parapet.⁷⁵

Refining the design was a slow and anxious process. As the Chief Engineer expressed it: 'I am so afraid of building this fine place with only the experience of our present adapted quarters to guide us'.⁷⁶ The design evolved over the following year, as the BBC's relentless growth saw it lay claim to the whole building (Ill. 17.15). The 'super studio', or concert hall, was relocated to the ground floor, a more practical place for large audiences and grand pianos. In its final form, Broadcasting House's plan blew up like a balloon to fill a newly defined building line, its outline now smoothed out but more irregular, with an arc of a lopsided ellipse on Portland Place running round the south end to meet the straight line of Langham Street. This new plan, presented in March 1929, determined the distinctive distorted-cylinder outline, and it unsettled some. Myer had a delicate task in satisfying all interested parties, including Reith (by now Sir John), the BBC's director general, who had various suggestions for giving the exterior a less 'institutional' appearance; and the irascible Colonel Edward Blount, surveyor to the Audley Trust and to the Howard de Walden Estate, which, under the terms of the original freehold sale, retained certain reserved powers as to the type of building to be erected. Blount, 'without wishing to criticise', found the design 'out of harmony' with the neighbourhood and asked for the opinion of the President of the RIBA – at that time Walter Tapper, who declined to see Myer but did appoint a sub-committee to advise on the design.⁷⁷

Myer secured supportive letters from Ralph Knott, architect of County Hall, and Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, who was generally approving, though he suggested a facing of 'small red brick with wide joints' to 'create a more interesting surface' than the intended Portland stone. The fat brick chimney of a building that would have resulted had some appeal for the BBC but was an innovation too far for the Howard de Walden Estate surveyors, who insisted on stone, with which Myer happily concurred as essential for a 'semi-Government building of such importance at the entrance to London's finest street'. He was more resistant to Blount's interference in matters of style,

however, finding it 'illogical and undesirable' to be asked to change the style of his building 'to conform with the ideas of other architects when rebuilding perhaps 20 years ago', adding that his design sat happily with the newly rebuilt Regent Street, which provided the prime vista of the new building (Ill. 17.16). There was a further deviation from the classical symmetry of Myer's initial design. On the flatter Portland Place frontage two wide, shallow end towers were set slightly forward of the long, curved frontage in between, which rose to a final, stepped-back storey marked by seven port-hole windows. To the south, facing down Langham Place, was a third tower making the main entrance. The asymmetry was intentional, allowing for future extension northwards where a fourth tower would echo that to the south, bringing coherence and completeness to the façade.⁷⁸

In the early months of 1929 a radically different design might have been forthcoming had London County Council proposals for cutting back the steps of All Souls, Langham Place, for road widening been implemented. That February, Reith and Solomon discussed the possibility of 'the whole church coming down' but the plan came to nothing and Myer's designs for Broadcasting House were approved in April.⁷⁹ Excavation and foundation work, by Holland, Hannen & Cubitts, began that summer. The contract for the steelwork, a tubular lattice of vast beams and stanchions to support the office floors around the engineering-brick studio-tower, was let in November 1929 to Moreland, Hayne & Co. Ltd. The main superstructure was built by Ford & Walton of Kilburn. Technical challenges extended to the three floors of basements, a depth which entailed the encasing in concrete of a sewer that passed under the site at a depth of 35ft, and bridging the Bakerloo Line which ran not far beneath. One of the most delicate tasks was lighting and ventilating the cocooned studio-tower. Tudsbery threatened to resign if his preferred contractors, Carrier Engineering Co. Ltd, were not appointed and they duly were, installing 32 water-cooled fans, drawing clean air through 120 tons of steel ducting, sound-insulated to restrict the noise to 10db. A borehole

was sunk though never deployed as enough water was always available from conventional sources.⁸⁰

Although the shape of the site determined the building's unusual outline, its character was more 'stripped classical' than outright modern, with ranks of conventional windows rather than continuous glazing. Not so the interiors and sculptural decoration. Initially this was entirely in the hands of the development syndicate. In July 1929, Val Myer and Solomon discussed appointing an artist to create exterior carving and advise on the decoration of the entrance hall. Solomon rejected Myer's suggestions of William Reid Dick and Charles Hartwell, both recognizably purveyors of the New Sculpture of the 1890s, but praised Charles Jagger, if only faintly, as 'excellent if we decided upon a purely unexciting and conventional decoration'. Though Herbert Read is generally acknowledged as suggesting Eric Gill for the sculpture at Broadcasting House, Solomon was already telling Val Myer in July 1929: 'The first man we should see is Eric Gill', citing his recent work on another high-profile public building, the London Underground headquarters at 55 Broadway. For colour decoration in the entrance hall Solomon suggested Rex Whistler, though he 'might be too inclined to paint pictures for this work', and – a choice no less adventurous than Gill – Stanley Spencer. Myer countered, proposing Frank Brangwyn to paint two large murals 13ft 6in wide and 5ft high in the main reception, and suggesting Richard Garbe and Gilbert Bayes as alternative sculptors. Myer also told Solomon he was sorry to hear of the latter's 'tender spot' for Eric Gill, saying 'his work rather makes me shudder'.⁸¹

In September 1929 Sir John Reith made it explicit to Solomon that the Corporation wanted the right of approval on sculpture and decoration, a condition to which he acceded. By November the final scheme had been confirmed of three bas-relief plaques at first-floor level, two on Portland Place and one on Langham Street, and a major figural group over the main Langham Place entrance, and Solomon commissioned several sculptors to

submit drawings indicating what they would produce if commissioned. Myer was horrified by one of Solomon's choices, the obscure (and presumably cheap) Sussex sculptor John Smith: 'any hope that I had of Mr Smith giving what I wanted has been crushed by what I saw last night'. Solomon, acknowledging their difference of opinion on decorative matters, gave Myer permission to approach other sculptors, but only those working in a 'modern' idiom: 'I have always held the definite view that I want sculpture that "dates" the building'.⁸²

Their differences reflected a wider anxiety, evident in discussions with the BBC and Edward Blount, about how to embody both the BBC's dignity as a public body, albeit a new one, and the novel status of broadcasting. Even as the foundations were about to be dug in July 1929, Blount was still dragging his heels on behalf of the Howard de Walden Estate and the Audley Trust, suggesting that 'restrictive covenants' might prevent the building being used for broadcasting.⁸³ His objections, apparently largely aesthetic, were smoothed by a further setting back of the curved south end above the entrance, in greater deference to All Souls Church and the view from Regent Street. Press coverage of the building when it opened picked over the questions of whether Broadcasting House was a 'classic' or 'modern' building, a fine line that Myer trod so carefully that there was no consensus over which label to apply.⁸⁴

Help in bolstering Solomon's modernist ambitions came from the unexpected source of Valentine Goldsmith, an assistant controller and, like his boss, the controller Charles Carpendale, an ex-Navy man. Goldsmith took part in meetings in 1930 of the Twentieth Century Group, set up to promote modern design, and also in the Design and Industries Association for establishing links between designers and manufacturers.⁸⁵ Already, in December 1929, while Val Myer was still anguishing over the question of style, Goldsmith had visited Eric Gill with Solomon, whom, he told Gill, 'has a very fine appreciative outlook on art ... in his hands will rest, if not the final

decision of the sculptor... at least the selection of those from whom ... choice will be made'.⁸⁶

While the question of sculpture was still being decided, Goldsmith's BBC colleague Lance Sieveking had alerted him and Solomon to the richly moderne interiors of 'Finella', a Victorian house on the Cambridge backs belonging to Mansfield Forbes, a forward-thinking don whose innovative use of materials – copper doors, rubber floors, and aluminium-foiled walls – celebrated the aesthetic possibilities of modernism as opposed to the technical.⁸⁷ Goldsmith was appointed in November 1930 to head a Broadcasting House decoration committee, and a consultant was sought who would guide 'decoration specialists' in designing the 22 studios, to be advised by a 'technical decoration' sub-committee under Tudsbury. Goldsmith's determination to keep the interiors out of 'the hands of the period decorator' was reflected in the appointment of Raymond McGrath, the 27-year-old Australian architect and Cambridge academic who had designed the 'Finella' interiors.⁸⁸

McGrath's team of specialists, appointed by Goldsmith in the spring of 1931, was equally up-to-the-minute, including Serge Chermayeff and Wells Coates, associates of McGrath who were sympathetic to Goldsmith's functionalist ambitions.⁸⁹ Coates had an engineering background, and it was he who designed the studios with complex technical requirements, such as the eighth-floor control room, and also the studios and control rooms for effects, news and drama on the fourth, sixth and seventh floors. For these new activities he devised furniture from first principles, such as the futuristic, spaceship-like drama control desk, and a combined gramophone and reading desk with a swivel chair that fitted into its curve, allowing for silent, economical movement.⁹⁰ Chermayeff designed the two eighth-floor studios, including that for military bands, with banjo-shaped combined lights and ventilators, and also the third-floor studios for children's hour, talks and news reporting, as well as much of the chromed tubular-steel furniture supplied by

PEL Ltd (Ill. 17.17). McGrath, a 'magician with colours', designed the sub-basement dance-band and double-height vaudeville studios – described as a 'poem' in orange-worsted fabric, shot with fawn on the seats, grey and tangerine on the walls, and yellow and black resin-coated doors and screens.⁹¹

Throughout, signage, switches, clocks, telephones and microphone stands were all standardized. In all these studios (many fitted out by Trollope & Colls Ltd) and their attendant waiting and dressing rooms, the 'three musketeers', especially McGrath, adopted a bold palette of colours and materials. Floors were clad in carpet, cork tiles or rubber ornamented with bold geometric shapes, walls with acoustically appropriate Donnacona, a Canadian spruce-fibre buff-coloured board, or Beatl, a urea formaldehyde sheet used to clad dados in several studios, inspired by Gropius's use of a similar German product called Trolit.⁹² Only British and Empire products were to be used in Broadcasting House, so many were specially manufactured. Elsewhere, black glass, polished wood and geometrically patterned Lincrusta, and McGrath's 'Finella' wallcoverings created an unexpected sense of luxury, lending the studios 'an air of quality and finish comparable in its own way to that imparted by the filigree cipher of a French eighteenth-century key'.⁹³

Myer himself designed the concert hall, large enough to seat up to 750 people (Ill. 17.18). This was essentially a large music studio for classical concerts, occupying the lower-ground, ground and first floors of the studio-tower. It was a muscular Art Deco space with a balcony and heavily beamed and panelled concrete walls and ceilings, the surfaces designed to break up sound waves. Shallow bas-relief panels by Gilbert Bayes, of musical scenes inspired by Keats and Shakespeare, formed a dado to either side. The absence of natural light in the studio-tower was combated by false windows and, in the basement press listening room, by a mural by Eastland Fortey suggested a view from a skyscraper.⁹⁴

Outside the modernist redoubt of the studio-tower the treatment was more varied. The semi-circular entrance hall (Ill. 17.19), the double-height council chamber above it, and the Director General's office and boardroom on the third floor, were all in a more sober palette of luxurious materials, such as Hopton Wood stone and walnut and oak panelling, stripped classical with a hint of Art Deco in flavour. Edward Maufe designed the religious studio on the third floor – a double-height balconied space in an idiosyncratic Hollywood Byzantine style, with a star-spangled ceiling, green columns with silver and gold capitals and 'happy pink' walls, where 'Catholic and Calvinist, Jew and Moslem should feel equally at home'. On the same floor the Talks Studio was designed by Dorothy Warren Trotter to suggest 'a small quiet library ... in a small town or country house', so as not alarm 'elderly dons and clergymen' with chrome and glass.⁹⁵

By the time the interiors were under way, Eric Gill had been appointed to produce the external sculpture featuring Ariel, who, in the BBC's view, 'as the invisible spirit of the air might well serve as a personification of broadcasting'. Gill worked on site, carving direct and primitive bas reliefs of *Ariel Hearing Celestial Music*, *Ariel between Gaiety and Wisdom*, on the west side and *Ariel Piping to the Children* on the east (Ill. 17.20). More prominent and controversial was the giant pair over the entrance, of an Old Testament Prospero sheltering a naked Ariel, whose impressive genitalia Gill was obliged to scale down at the BBC's request. Also by Gill at the rear of the entrance hall facing the main door was another stylised figure of *The Sower*, an allegory of the BBC sowing the seeds of knowledge.⁹⁶

By the time the building was ready for occupation in April 1932, the BBC's staff was spread over several sites near Savoy Hill, on and off the Strand. The high-concept interior design for the new building was pragmatically applied, especially in areas not on general view: 'almost all the carpets at Savoy Hill in which there was any life, have been fitted into rooms at Broadcasting House'.⁹⁷

As early as February 1929 Val Myer had proposed acquiring 10 and 12 Portland Place adjoining on which to build the concert hall, thereby freeing up more space for offices without losing the shops and lettable office space. That idea stalled but the freeholds were acquired in March 1931 and by February 1933 the BBC was discussing with the LCC arrangements for extending the studio-tower northwards on to the new site, with Val Myer and Edward Maufe proposed as joint architects.⁹⁸ The cost and complexity involved in negotiating for multiple small sites influenced a 1934 report to the BBC Governors, which recommended instead the acquisition of the Langham Hotel, a single freehold site offering more freedom and allowing for 'pyramid expansion in the manner of the London Underground building at St James'. That also came to nothing and in 1934–8 the BBC laboriously assembled leases and freeholds of the houses at 14–22 Portland Place, all of Chapel Mews (between Duchess and Langham Streets), and adjoining houses in Duchess Street, Hallam Street and at 9–19 Langham Street (mostly Scott's Hotel).⁹⁹

Staff already installed in the Portland Place houses were decanted to 9–19 Langham Street in 1937, in anticipation of the extension. In August 1938 demolition began and five designs for a 20,000 sq. ft extension were submitted. That selected, by Val Myer and Watson-Hart, with Wimperis, Simpson & Guthrie, was for offices and rehearsal rooms and a large top-floor restaurant, with five basement studios isolated in a separate, tanked shell sunk 54ft into the ground. Mimicking the original design, by doubling the width of the north projecting bay it would have created a symmetrical frontage to Portland Place up to Duchess Street and a central 'light court' above first floor level. Estimated for completion by the end of 1940, no building progress had been made by the time war broke out in 1939.¹⁰⁰

The war was not kind to Broadcasting House. The concert hall and other underground rooms were adapted as air-raid shelters and dormitories, and the building's exterior painted a dark, muddy green to make it less of a

gleaming target for bombers. This notwithstanding, Broadcasting House sustained serious damage on both sides in 1940 and 1941, which wrecked the religious studio and music library, and left no floor untouched. Under wartime and postwar restrictions on materials, repairs were utilitarian, a 'coat of distemper' favoured over McGrath's luxurious earlier approach to materials. One bomb had fallen on Chapel Mews, off Langham Street, part of the site earmarked for extension. A temporary, ultra-utilitarian two-storey building, known as the 'stronghold', with four studios and other core facilities to be used should Broadcasting House be destroyed, was built in 1941–2 in reinforced concrete on the corner of Hallam and Duchess Streets, designed to withstand a direct hit from a 500lb bomb. The rapid development of broadcasting technology, with the new Empire Service and the advance of television, was also no respecter of high-concept interior design. Before the war, Coates's top-floor control room had been largely superseded by continuity suites, where each studio had its own adjacent control room allowing a nimbler response in the age of live broadcast. All this and the bomb damage meant that by the end of the war most of the original wall finishes and much of the specially designed furniture and fittings had gone.¹⁰¹

An extension was still badly needed. In 1934–41 the BBC had rented office space at Brook House in Park Lane, at 63 and 103 Great Portland Street, and in the newly built Egton House, 2–4 Langham Street, later the home of Radio 1. From 1941 it also took over more and more space in the Langham Hotel. The Broadcasting House extension (known as BHX) was finally built in 1957–61 to the designs of H. Fitzroy Robinson and Hubert H. Bull, architects and surveyors, with Sir Howard Robertson as consultant.¹⁰² It was a plain H-plan office building ten storeys high at its centre and southern end with a terraced roof-top restaurant, the two north wings of seven storeys, and parking for outside broadcast and other vehicles in between.¹⁰³ The Portland Place–

Duchess Street wing was faced in Portland Stone, that on Hallam and Duchess Streets in brown brick with strip windows.

After two decades of apparent decline, radio was on the rise again by the end of the 1960s, and in 1981, having acquired the freehold of the Langham Hotel in 1965, the BBC commissioned Norman Foster to design a bold new headquarters for radio on the hotel site (see also page ###).¹⁰⁴ A change in BBC management saw Foster's 'thrillingly high-tech but transparent and unifying' scheme abandoned in 1984 and the Langham Hotel sold, and the new 'crass tin shed' called White City One built in 1990 on the site of the greyhound stadium at White City, near Television Centre. A seven-storey office building in Portland stone, with a modish ground floor in stripy two-tone granite, was built in 1994 filling in the Duchess Street courtyard of BHX.¹⁰⁵

Broadcasting House staggered on with piecemeal alterations but was increasingly shabby and obsolescent.¹⁰⁶ It is widely believed that it was the arrival of digital radio and the BBC's expansion of its stations that in the end saved the building. A decision was made to consolidate the Corporation's fissiparous London properties (of which there were thirty by 2000) into three centres – Broadcasting House, Television Centre and White City. BBC News, BBC Radio & Music and the World Service were to be accommodated in a new, expanded Broadcasting House.

In 2000 the BBC held a competition seeking concept designs for replacing the 1950s BHX, refurbishing Broadcasting House (now listed Grade II*), and expanding on to the sites of Egton House and new offices adjoining at 16–28 Langham Street. The schemes varied wildly in their plausibility. Alsop and Störmer came up with a preposterous design, with 13 jelly-like organic glazed cones, some squatting on the top of Broadcasting House, some on a new public space to the cleared north-east of the site. Fletcher Priest, Stanton Williams and Eric Parry Architects all produced variations on two

glazed boxes, one across the north of the site, another smaller one to the east allowing public space on the L-shaped portion of Langham Street.¹⁰⁷

In September 2000 MacCormac Jamieson Prichard (MJP) were appointed with the only design that engaged aesthetically with Val Myer's building. The BHX building was to be replaced with a square twelve-storey block, with two atria (Ill. 17.21), lifts and complex open interlocking staircases along its south side, and a new wing to be built on the east side of Langham Street north of All Souls Place. This wing was to be treated as a slightly reduced mirror of Broadcasting House, with a similar elliptical curve at its south end, sweeping north and round to meet Broadcasting House across Langham Street, on whose closure (secured in 2005) the design depended, creating a new public space offering open access to Hallam Street.¹⁰⁸

The design sought to embody a new openness at the BBC, with panels of clear glass to allow views of the interior at night, and also some opaque glass, intended to match the colour of the existing Portland stone. Four new floors were added on Broadcasting House replacing its lopsided catslide north roof. The combined curving frontage acts as a backdrop to All Souls (Ill. 17.22), with the new wing's concave southern end faced in Portland stone to respect the aesthetic of neighbouring buildings.

The renovation of Broadcasting House, by now suffering from 'Regent Street disease' with water creeping between the stone facing and rusting steelwork, cracking the stone, was radical. The studio-tower was gutted and its floors replaced, and a five-storey atrium inserted on its north side – though increasing demands for accommodation saw a cylindrical column of meeting rooms inserted in the centre of the atrium during construction (Ill. 17.??). Plans to glaze the north side of the refurbished studio-tower were abandoned at the request of presenters, notably from Radio 4, who preferred not to be viewed while broadcasting and so remained in the well-insulated studios of Broadcasting House with its distinctive pure acoustic. External stonework and internal fittings, such as clocks and panelling to the council chamber and

governors' boardroom, were removed, cleaned and refitted, and the artists' foyer, entrance hall and concert hall (since 1994 known as the Radio Theatre) were refurbished, and the latter's floor raised to allow disabled access, and a new configurable stage built. The BBC retained control over furniture, branding and special lighting.¹⁰⁹

Bovis Lend Lease were appointed the main contractors and demolition work began in December 2002. To minimize disruption, the project was split in two, the reconstruction of Broadcasting House and the building of the new east wing, initially known as the Egton Wing, proceeding while staff moved into BHX, which was replaced once Phase I was complete.

As with the original Broadcasting House, the BBC commissioned artworks, temporary and permanent, including various films and a plaster cast of the interior of Room 101 at Broadcasting House, by Rachel Whiteread, in homage to George Orwell, who had worked at the BBC during the war (though there is no evidence that this Room 101, latterly a plant room, had any significance for him).¹¹⁰

The whole of the paving between the wings on the former north-south portion of Langham Street was ornamented with 'World', a tribute to the World Service by Mark Pimlott featuring lines of longitude and latitude in steel and brass with 750 place-names from around the world, and from history, mythology and fantasy, carved into the granite flagstones; ground-mounted speakers broadcast the station to the public. A light sculpture, *Breathing* by Jaume Plensa and Richard MacCormac, was installed on the roof of the new east wing in 2005, an inverted glass cone, with an etched inscription, that at 10pm every night projects a beam of light 3km into the sky as a memorial to journalists killed on duty. Martin Richman and Tony Cooper designed a lighting scheme to link All Souls and Broadcasting House at night.¹¹¹

All did not run smoothly with the project, however. In 2005, with Phase I still under way, MJP and the BBC parted company, citing 'creative

differences' (principally, the Corporation's wish to scale back on MJJ's grand 43,000 sq. ft newsroom with a dramatic domed structure planned for Phase II). Sheppard Robson were then appointed architects in their place for the remainder of the contract. (The BBC was later censured for its shortcomings as a client by the National Audit Office, not least for the £110m overspend.)¹¹²

Sheppard Robson designed instead a new double-height newsroom with galleries reached by helical staircases, its flat roof supported by simple giant columns (Ill. 17.24). The newsroom extends to the Langham Street frontage, allowing views from there and also from a new public walkway that runs through the building from Portland Place to Langham Street. The newsroom also forms the backdrop for BBC television news broadcasts. The transparency here and on the façade extended to the interior with many small glass meeting rooms, named after BBC luminaries (a conceit parodied in the BBC comedy *W1A*).

Major reorganization and decentralization by the BBC from 2007 saw the closure of Television Centre at White City and the removal of 700 staff from New Broadcasting House to its new centre at Salford Quays in 2011–13. The Egton Wing was renamed the John Peel Wing in 2012, after the Radio 1 DJ who died in 2004, and the Persian, Arabic and later Burmese services were moved there after Bush House in Aldwych was given up. All BBC news, national radio and World Service moved to New Broadcasting House in 2012–13, requiring some circulation spaces to be given up to accommodate more desks. Phase II was officially opened in June 2013, by which time the total budget had exceeded £1bn.

Nos 24–32

Of this short block of Adam houses, of c.1777–84, only **No. 24**, at the Duchess Street corner, has gone, having been replaced in 1894 by a block of brick-and-

stone flats by W. Henry White (Ill. 17.25). One of the earliest Portland Place rebuildings, it set a precedent, being unreservedly in the 'Free' style then in vogue with White and the Howard de Walden Estate, without any concessions to the rather good Adam terrace of which it formed a part. The developer appears to have been the prominent local figure (Sir) James Boyton. All the living and bedrooms were in the much longer Duchess Street frontage, where the entrance was located, and where some spirited bays of carved stone decoration were included (Ill. 17.25a). A small extension block (**24A**) was added shortly afterwards at the rear, on a gap on the Duchess Street return.¹¹³

The trio of houses at Nos 26–30 form an important group, with a range of good interiors.

No. 26 was for a long time the home of Edwin Sandys, 2nd Baron Sandys (2nd creation), of Ombersley, Worcestershire, formerly MP for Westminster (resident 1779–92). It ceased to be a single residence in 1929 when the lessee, G. P. Joseph, sublet the ground floor and basement to doctors and converted the upper floors to his own maisonette, adding a sweeping new lower flight to the staircase. Within two years the lower floors had been taken by the Royal Society of Tropical Medicine & Hygiene for its headquarters, bringing considerable change, with the creation of a large basement auditorium (designed by J. N. Randall Vining), lit by a glass dome in the rear yard. The building was officially opened by the Prince of Wales in 1932 and renamed Manson House in honour of a founding President of the society (though Joseph retained his maisonette as a paying tenant).¹¹⁴

Most of these alterations were removed recently during reconversion back to a family dwelling. There is much Adam and Adam-style plasterwork in the house, of varying dates, but the stairwell appears to be the genuine article, with the sorts of Joseph Rose & Co. sculpted and moulded decorations that are common to other Adam houses in the area. Also the first-floor drawing rooms still have their Adam ceilings and friezes, as designed at the

Adelphi in February 1776, the rear one a good example of the tripartite geometric style then favoured by Robert Adam for such houses, with an antique-derived feature of a central curved cross. Other fittings in these rooms are probably later revival work, perhaps added by Edward James Pape, a wealthy property developer and confidant of the Marquess of Queensberry, who lived here in the mid 1890s, or Lord Wenlock, who succeeded him around 1898.¹¹⁵

At the centre of the group, **No. 28** retains its Adam pediment and Ionic pilasters (though both were raised in the nineteenth century to accommodate an extra storey), as well as a later Doric entrance porch. Despite many changes it still exudes an aura of old-world elegance (Ill. 17.26). Its first resident from 1785 till 1797 was Alexander Blair, a successful Birmingham soap manufacturer and timber merchant, and his wife Mary, later a popular society hostess. Their daughter, the writer Mary Margaret Busk, was born at the house in 1779.¹¹⁶ Then for nearly 140 years, until the 1920s, No. 28 was home to the Gosling family, beginning in 1797 with the wealthy banker William Gosling (d. 1834), head of the Fleet Street firm Goslings & Sharpe. Though not aristocratic, the family held a prominent position in society, with an estate and country mansion, Hassobury House, near Farnham in Essex; William Gosling also acquired the James Wyatt villa at Roehampton Grove, formerly occupied by Mrs Fitzherbert. His wife Charlotte was a daughter of the 2nd Lord Walsingham and the first of several Gosling women to be renowned for the excellence of their routs and parties at Portland Place. The London press eagerly reported the balls hosted by this 'distinguished luminary of the fashionable world' – the staircase lit by crystal lamps, the three first-floor rooms set out for dancing and specially decorated by a Mr Elmsmore, covers laid in the ground-floor rooms, including the large 'bow' banqueting room, music by Haydn and arias from Don Giovanni.¹¹⁷

Though it was sold by the Goslings to the Institute of Hygiene in 1928 and has been in institutional or corporate use ever since, No. 28 is still a first-rate example of a London society townhouse adapted and added to over time by one family. The interiors have survived well, of which the most notable is an exceptionally fine ballroom, comprising a suite of linked first-floor drawing rooms fitted out in an elaborate late-Victorian Adam Revival style, with an abundance of painted and gilded plaster decorations and a figurative front-room chimneypiece in the manner of Wyatt (Ill. 17.27). The most likely candidate for these changes is Mrs Eleanor Gosling, wife of Robert Gosling, JP (d. 1895), who throughout the 1880s and 90s followed her predecessors' example as a busy hostess, with dances and balls every season.¹¹⁸ A ground-floor suite of two linked rooms is fitted out in similar style, though not so lavishly. One Adam piece has survived the refurbishments: a marble chimneypiece with decorative plaques in Wedgwood Jasperware, including a central panel showing a bull being led to sacrifice (Ill. 17.28). This is thought to be by William Hackwood, representing 'The Sacrifice to Love'; another copy is in the Birmingham Museum of Art. The house was badly damaged during the war and restored in 1956, when Mrs Gosling's Ballroom was converted to a lecture theatre.¹¹⁹

The neighbouring house at **No. 30** is also of considerable interest, though for different reasons. Like Nos 26 and 28 it was begun in 1777, the building lessees being the Greenwich carpenters and partners James Swinton and Richard Martyr. But they encountered difficulties with the construction, including the regular theft of large timbers from the site in 1777 by one John Kitson - said to have taken enough timber from in and around Portland Place to build a house. No. 30 was finally completed in 1794, when it was let to Mumbee Goulburn (or Goulbourn) of Jamaica. Later occupants included the Smith family, who were linked by marriage to the Goslings next door.¹²⁰ In plan the house was straightforward, though typical of the care Robert Adam

took in varying room shapes, with partitioning used to make a curve at the far end of the rear ground-floor breakfast parlour and at both ends of the second drawing room, echoed by other shallow curves in the rear closet wing (see Ill. 17.6); these features are still traceable in the house today. Several Adam office designs for chimneypieces, friezes and ceilings relate to No. 30, but only the drawing-room ceilings, some friezes and a ground-floor relief roundel seem to remain *in situ*.¹²¹

That any eighteenth-century fabric survives at all is surprising given the comprehensive and expensive refit in 1901 by the Liberal politician and merchant banker William Charles Heaton-Armstrong, who lived there with his family from 1898 until around 1911, when the failure of his bank forced him to move. He introduced new fireplaces and overmantels throughout, built a new staircase in oak, panelled the entire interior in the same material, and added parquet flooring, new ceilings, mouldings and dadoes, all 'of most modern style'. His successor in 1911, Lady Margaret Jenkins, spent heavily reversing much of this, reintroducing 'correct' Georgian panelling and mantelpieces and stone hall flooring which she thought more in keeping with the date of house.¹²²

In 1934 No. 30 was taken by Sir Kenneth Clark, newly appointed Director of the National Gallery and Surveyor of the King's Pictures, and his wife Jane.¹²³ Clark remembered the house as being 'far too big', and the *piano nobile* of Adam rooms as 'completely unnecessary', but he and his wife made use of the space to display their growing collection of important artworks and to entertain on a grand scale. Curtains, rugs and other fittings were commissioned from contemporary artists and friends like Marion Dorn, Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell (Ill. 17.29); the painter Graham Bell lived for a while in an upstairs room. Then in the summer of 1939 the house became the focus of Peggy Guggenheim's plans to open a museum of modern art in London. The Clarks, keen to remove their children and collection from central London with war looming, were happy to let the house for the purpose.

Negotiations progressed swiftly. Peggy Guggenheim picked Herbert Read as her director, persuading him to resign his editorship of the 'stuffy' *Burlington Magazine* in return for a five-year contract. The house being so large he was to live with his family on one floor, she on another. Read gave her a list of possible loans and acquisitions to acquire in Paris for an opening exhibition.

Her vision for the Portland Place Guggenheim Institute went beyond painting and sculpture, to embrace both visual and performing arts, with a theatre, library, various galleries and facilities for music and poetry recitals. But the outbreak of war put paid to the project, even though the lease had been agreed (but not signed). Sir Kenneth later suggested letting the house rent-free as a centre for artists to meet and exhibit their work, but it was requisitioned in 1940 and damaged by bombing in 1941, since when it has seen a variety of commercial uses. The only legacy of this fleeting Portland Place venture was Read's 'shopping list', which Peggy Guggenheim kept, and revised with the help of Marcel Duchamp and Nellie van Doesburg to form the basis for her own private collection of abstract and surrealist art.¹²⁴

The corner building at **No. 32** was one of the properties in the street built by Hepburn & James Hastie, in 1779–80, but is now barely recognizable as such, having been heavily Victorianized with rusticated ground-floor stucco, pedimented window surrounds and an entrance portico on New Cavendish Street. Being on a very short plot, because of the houses behind in New Cavendish Street, it was described as a 'poor house' around 1914, and has since lost some period chimneypieces to theft. It is now partitioned as offices.¹²⁵

Nos 34–60

This is the best run of surviving Adam-period houses in Portland Place, still with its eye-catching stuccoed and pedimented central pair at Nos 46–48, with their ingenious mirrored angled entrance doors. It is here that one gets the strongest sense of the Adam brothers' original palace-front design concept (Ill. 17.30).

Equally important in terms of its historic interiors is the corner house at **No. 34**, its first lessee in 1777 being the plasterer Joseph Rose.¹²⁶ Until recently used by the Polish Embassy as a visa office, it stands out from its neighbours, partly because it projects marginally (as designed by the Adams), partly for its prominent later dormers and ground-floor channelling. The elevation on the New Cavendish Street frontage suggests several phases of rebuilding and redecoration, including the addition of a stone balcony in 1867 above an earlier entrance portico there, and a rear billiard room (since rebuilt as 73 New Cavendish Street). But remarkably, although no Adam chimneypieces have been kept, the rich interior plasterwork decoration by Rose & Company has survived relatively intact. A sweeping staircase in a central D-shaped well is lined with plentiful grotesque and arabesque plasterwork details in shaped panels, as well as statuary niches and bands or friezes of other, less Adamesque decoration (Ill. 17.31). There are good ceilings to both ground-floor rooms, but it is the suite of three interconnected first-floor reception rooms where Rose's work is seen at its best (Ill. 17.32). As has been noted, there are drawings for these ceilings by both Rose and the Adam office, including a rough pencil sketch of the rear drawing room ceiling design by Robert Adam himself.¹²⁷ Early occupants of these well-decorated rooms included Munbee Goulburn of Jamaica, a West India planter (1782–3); the Northumbrian landowner Sir Matthew White Ridley, 2nd Bt, Mayor of

Newcastle (1784–92); and Prince Ludwig de Starhemberg, Ambassador to the Austrian Court (1794–c.1808).

The run of similar-looking houses at Nos 36–44 date from c.1778–80, constructed by various tradesmen working under the Hastie brothers as developers.

In recent years both **36** and **38** have been adapted for use as private schools. Former residents here include: William Henry Pigou (d. 1837), the East India Company's chief supercargo at Canton, who acquired the lease to No. 36 in 1787 and resided there until the 1800s, later selling his interest to the Rev. Dr Robert Price, Canon of Salisbury and Prebendary of Durham; and William Waldegrave, Admiral Lord Radstock (d. 1825), a son of the 3rd Earl Waldegrave, at No. 38 from 1799 until his death there in 1825.¹²⁸ Both houses have been much altered – No. 36 in 1978–80 for the British Institute of Radiology, when a lecture theatre was added at the rear, No. 38 extensively in 1988–90 for the Royal College of Radiology – but they retain elaborately decorated first-floor drawing rooms, mostly in the Adam Revival manner popular in years around 1900, though it is possible that some elements (such as the front room ceiling at 36) may be by the Roses. At No. 38 the fanlight, stair balustrade and plaster decorations of lion's heads, husks and paterae around the hall skylight appear to be original eighteenth-century work.¹²⁹

No. 40 was leased to the Titchfield Street carpenter-builder William Woolcott in 1776 and completed around 1777. Its first occupant briefly in 1779 was the Hon. Edward Foley, son of Baron Foley of Foley House, followed from 1780 until 1793 by the politician and landowner Sir Gregory Page Turner (d. 1805), 3rd Bt. Later residents included the bookseller and police magistrate Sir Nathaniel Conant, who died at the house in 1822.¹³⁰ Now converted to offices, No. 40 has few interior features beyond the decorative plasterwork ceilings in its two first-floor reception rooms. These share some of the delicacy of Adam

work but not the sophistication or sense of proportion, and are attributable to Joseph Rose junior; a design by him for the rear drawing room ceiling survives in his sketchbook at Harewood House.¹³¹

At **No. 42** the balustrade was replaced and many of the main rooms refurbished in the later nineteenth century in an Aesthetic style, with tall friezes, Lincrusta-type ceilings, much panelling, chimneypieces and other fittings in dark wood, and plush upholstery. A billiard room was added at the rear and a conservatory, approached by a glazed passage. Residents at the time included the leading West End moneylender Julius Calisher (d. 1877) and his widow, followed in the mid 1880s by Arthur Lewis Raphael (d. 1891), of the banking family, and Lt-Gen. Sir Andrew Clarke in the 1890s. In 2002 CSK Architects extended the billiard room into a contemporary two-storey link between the house and mews block, with a glass pyramidal roof.¹³² The front drawing room retains an Adam-style ceiling, which again is possibly the handiwork of the Roses or later revival work.

What looks to be another suite of good drawing-room plasterwork ceilings and friezes designed by the Roses survives at **No. 44**, a house originally leased in 1776 to James MacDouall, a stone mason, who by 1778 had been declared bankrupt.¹³³ Residents here included two eminent clerics: William Carey, Bishop of Exeter and of St Asaph, who died at the house in 1846, followed by Hugh Chambres Jones, Archdeacon of Essex (d. 1869). After sustaining war damage, the house was converted in the 1950s to the headquarters of the Institute of Mining and Metallurgy. In commercial use since then, No. 44 was, at the time of writing (2014), being converted back to a large single family residence (by Latitude Architects).¹³⁴

Various alterations have changed the appearance of the middle pair at **Nos 46** and **48**, marring though not completely obliterating the powerful original

composition. Its crowning balustrade has gone but for once, when the upper floor was extended around 1870, rather than building up the front wall as elsewhere in the street, the builders left the central pediment *in situ*, with an enlarged mansard roof and dormers rising behind (Ill. 17.30).¹³⁵

Like its partner opposite (No. 37, now demolished), this façade was faced entirely in stucco and decorated with a frieze, pilasters, roundels and characteristic Adam panels of griffins and urns of the same material. Unusually the rusticated ground floor has the windows flanking the entrance set within relieving arches. Particularly elegant is the shared entrance within a shallow apse under a segmental arch, with the two doorways set at an angle (Ill. 17.31). Victorian decorative filigree ironwork and glazing added to the doors heighten the effect. One puzzle, though, is the treatment of the central bay above, on the upper floors, where a blind window marks the position of the party wall. This may be a later modification, as Malton's view of Portland Place, of c.1800 – one of the earliest and most convincing topographical prints – shows a columnar screen here, set within a recess under a segmental relieving arch, echoing that of the entrance below (see Ill. 17.10). Such a motif is typical of Adam, occurring elsewhere in his work (e.g. Fitzroy Square), and would have been possible only in this pair of houses, where the curved walls of the mirrored first-floor front drawing rooms leave space for such a recess.

That refinement of internal planning is still evident today (despite conversion in the 1930s to consulting rooms and maisonettes), especially in the rear drawing room at 48, which has apsidal corners with niches flanking the connecting door and rear window, decorated with stucco swags. Both interiors retain important decorations, especially the Joseph Rose plasterwork ceilings in the first-floor drawing rooms, and several good friezes (Ill. 17/34). As already noted, the design of those at No. 46 can be attributed to Joseph Rose senior and junior. There is also much later work, some of it Adam Revival, and No. 46 has attractive painted staircase decorations forming a sort of dado, incorporating classical figures – possibly a Deco addition in homage

to the Adam surroundings made by the Dunvilles, an Irish distilling family with mansions in Co. Down and Navan, who resided at No. 46 from the 1890s till c.1930 (Ill. 17.35).¹³⁶

Though William Adam & Co. built No. 48, they seem to have devolved its twin at 46 to the Hastie brothers, perhaps in lieu of an unpaid debt. Both stood empty for some time (William Adam described 48 shortly after its sale as a 'dead loss'). Their first lessees in the early to mid 1780s were: St John Charlton of Apley Castle, Shropshire, Esq (No. 46, 1783–90); and Colonel (later Lt-General) Charles Morgan (d.1818), Commander-in-Chief in India (No. 48, 1786–1818).¹³⁷

Both **Nos 50–52** and **56–58** continue the rhythm of the well-preserved brick-faced row at 36–44 (though 52 has since been stuccoed). No. 50 has connections with banking: William Lushington, East India Company writer, later connected with the banking house of Boldero, Adey, Lushington & Boldero of Cornhill, lived here from 1783 to 1797, and John Labouchere, a partner in Williams, Deacons & Co.'s bank, was a resident in the 1840s. This house is now the Education Department of the Embassy of the People's Republic of China. Early occupants at No. 52 included the Viscountess Dowager Hereford (resident 1791–1800) and Lady Clara Clavering (1813–20), the daughter of a French nobleman, who was smuggling clandestine notes about the Duke of Wellington's intentions to Napoleon Bonaparte's circle at the time of his arrest and exile to St Helena in 1815.¹³⁸ The house was expensively updated in 1899 by a new lessee, Mary Jeune, Baroness St Helier (d. 1931), one of the great London hostesses of the turn of the century. Friends who came to stay with her at No. 52 included the novelist Edith Wharton and the Canadian fighter pilot Bill Bishop. Her greatest coup was to bring together Winston Churchill and her great niece Clementine Hozier at a dinner party in 1908, and later that year to host their wedding breakfast at No. 52 after a marriage ceremony at St Margaret's Church, Westminster. Lady St Helier was

to be the last private occupant, in 1931, before the house was converted to offices. It was most recently restored and refurbished in the mid 1980s as the headquarters of John Laing plc by their subsidiary Holloway White Allom.¹³⁹

The pair at Nos 56–58 has since 1995 been joined together as a school. No. 56 had been refurbished in 1922 for Lady Algernon Gordon-Lennox (the mother of Ivy Cavendish-Bentinck, Duchess of Portland), to designs by W. A. Forsyth, of Forsyth & Maule, architects. Forsyth was respectful of the surviving Adam work, and in 1924 the front drawing room ceiling was apparently ‘found’ (presumably beneath a later ceiling) with what were thought to be its original colours intact; photographs taken in 1944 show this and its counterpart in the rear drawing room to have been of very high quality. No. 58 was for most of the nineteenth century the London townhouse of successive Earls of Sheffield, and in the early 1900s was the home of the surgeon Sir Charters Symonds, Consulting Surgeon to Guys Hospital. The Adam ceilings here were badly damaged in 1941 by an anti-aircraft shell falling through the roof.¹⁴⁰

Between these two pairs, **No. 54** was rebuilt around 1923 as a private house to designs by the architect G. H. Wenyon, but behind his mutilated façade at the time of writing was simply a hole in the ground, as the site (which includes 5 Hallam Mews) is the subject of a new office development by Andrew Lett Architects for the Howard de Walden Estate.¹⁴¹

The corner block, **Nos 60 and 60A**, is a refronting and partial rebuilding in Portland stone of 1925–6, designed by the architect George Vernon as apartments for the Knightsbridge contractor Major Arthur F. Vigor. The adjoining buildings around the corner at 13–15 Weymouth Street were also rebuilt at the same time, in red brick and stone, and numbered 11A in that street. (Vernon was at the same time designing Stone House alongside at 9 Weymouth Street, see page ###). Originally occupied as medical suites and

maisonettes, No. 60 was in the 1960s–90s the Embassy of the Somali Democratic Republic.¹⁴²

RIBA headquarters, Nos 66–68

Ian Nairn once noted the irony that the RIBA's headquarters should be located in Portland Place: the one street in London he felt had been 'most stupidly and selfishly and blindly ruined by twentieth-century R.I.B.A. members'. But Wornum's building, with its sophisticated union of clean lines and classical proportions, is not one of those brutal transgressors (Ill. 17/36).¹⁴³

Before its move to Portland Place in the mid thirties, the RIBA had basked in the club-like surroundings of a large James Wyatt house at 9 Conduit Street. Despite several additions, by the 1920s this was becoming cramped and increasingly unsuitable for such an institution, especially one with a growing library. Initial ideas for new headquarters included a possible joint home with the Architectural Association (AA) in a new building at Bedford Square; another early favourite was the University of London's block at Burlington Gardens. When both fell through several other sites were considered, including Norfolk House in St James's Square and part of the future Senate House site. Finally, in March 1929 a 999-year lease was agreed with the Howard de Walden Estate for the four Adam houses on the corner site at 62–68 Portland Place, along with the adjoining smaller houses and garages at 14–20 Weymouth Street and 14–15 Williams Mews.¹⁴⁴

Maurice Webb, Chairman of the RIBA's Building Committee, then drew up rough sketch plans showing how the necessary accommodation could best be arranged on the site. Next came the inevitable architectural competition – an open one in this instance – the brief for which was issued in April 1931, with the intention of using the entire site at Nos 62–68. The task required courage, as the winning design would have to satisfy the

expectations of the nation's architects – a notoriously difficult and fractious bunch. The use of Portland stone as a facing was mandatory but otherwise there were no restrictions on style, though the assessors expressed a desire for a design reflecting the 'dignity and significance to the national life of the profession of architecture'. No beguiling perspective views were allowed.¹⁴⁵ The assessors were: Robert Atkinson, Charles Holden, H. V. Lanchester, Percy Worthington and Sir Giles Gilbert Scott. 'No provincial town hall or banking headquarters would be likely to succeed with them', said C. H. Reilly. Scott's openness, dislike of dogma, and innate good sense made him an excellent choice as chief assessor.¹⁴⁶

Surprisingly few of the 284 competition entries received were either strictly traditionalist or truly modernist; a hotly anticipated battle between the two camps never materialized. Most designs trod a cautious middle path in variations of the stripped classical style then in vogue, of which Portland Place already had several examples, the most prominent being Broadcasting House. Also, the pleas for a design expressive of national character went largely unheeded. On this theme, H. S. Goodhart-Rendel – who with Clough Williams-Ellis emerged as the most readable of the commentators in the architectural press – thought the competition revealed an 'inferiority complex' on the part of British architecture, most entries being derivative of contemporary work in Sweden and America.¹⁴⁷ Many contestants struggled to accommodate successfully the competition's difficult requirement for discrete lettable office space for related societies, in addition to the exhibition galleries, function rooms, library space and offices required for the RIBA's own needs. The winning entry from Wornum was no different in this respect, the strange lumpy rooftop office-space of his elevation seemingly at odds with the clean, minimalist lines of the Swedish-inspired main block beneath (Ill. 17.37); Goodhart-Rendel thought the design showed a poor 'taste in hats'.¹⁴⁸

Having been a medal-winner at the Architectural Association (AA) in his youth, Wornum maintained close links with that institution, serving as

President in 1929–30. Indeed, it was an AA trip to Stockholm in 1930, led by Wornum, that provided the inspiration for many of the architectural ideas which found expression in his RIBA design for Portland Place. Wornum's particular source seems to have been Gunnar Asplund's Stockholm City Library (1920–8), where the simple symmetrical arrangement of the otherwise austere white façade – with a single tall central window flanked by smaller squares and rectangles, all above a rusticated base – is strikingly similar.

Naturally, not everyone approved of Wornum's elevation. S. D. Adshead thought it failed to suggest a 'great meeting house of architects'; Charles Reilly described it as 'reticent ... yet with occasional touches of fire'; and if judged alone on that count Frank Bennett would have placed it a poor seventh behind Richardson & Gill in first place and Maxwell Fry in second. However, it was not the elevation that won over the assessors, but Wornum's imaginative handling of interior space and staircase levels, most convincingly expressed in his plan and section. There were none of the 'wasteful' long corridors or lobbies usually associated with semi-public buildings. Nonetheless, the assessors made public their view that they had found no design entirely suitable, but were happy that what they had found was a scheme that was 'workable' and capable of alteration, and, above all, the 'right man' for the job.¹⁴⁹

A giant exhibition followed at Thames House on Millbank, where every drawing included in the 284 entries was put on public show. The disparateness of the premiated designs seemed to support the view that the RIBA had chosen a man rather than a plan. But in reality it is doubtful that any of the other schemes if pursued would have bettered Wornum's. Clough Williams-Ellis thought his entry easily rose above the 'tedious mass of uninspiring stodge' on show. A design by Verner O. Rees in second place was thought to match Wornum's in its planning, but his elevation had 'too much of the steel frame' about it. Those by Brian O'Rorke & Kenneth Peacock, and Percy Thomas & Ernest Prestwich, which tied for third, had their merits, but

both made the mistake of relegating the important RIBA exhibition halls to an upper floor.¹⁵⁰

Before work could begin, the continuing depression brought a cut in costs and a 35 per cent reduction to the scheme's capacity. Wornum was asked to revise his design, omitting No. 68 and the rooftop office extension, in the hope that these might be added later. Inside, Wornum took the opportunity to enlarge the RIBA's basement meeting room and foyer, and make other changes. The overall effect was to improve his scheme, especially its elevation. Work finally got under way in June 1933 with the laying of the foundation stone by Baron Howard de Walden.¹⁵¹

Given the halving of his proposed budget to just £100,000 and the limited funds left for decorations, it is one of Wornum's major achievements that he succeeded in honouring a pledge to make the new building a showcase of the best in English craftsmanship and materials.¹⁵² He put his trust in a handpicked, loyal cadre of relatively unknown but talented young artists rather than established figures. These included: Edward Bainbridge Copnall, a 'vigorous young Rugby football playing sculptor' (and painter) whom Wornum had discovered at Liverpool; James Woodford, another sculptor, and a former Prix de Rome winner, later to become well known for his 'Queen's Beasts' for the 1953 coronation at Westminster Abbey; and the South-African born glass engraver and illustrator Jan Juta. Wornum's wife Miriam (née Gerstle), a gifted interior designer, was responsible for many of the colour schemes and textiles. For all, the RIBA was a valuable early commission.¹⁵³

Wornum established an office next door at the reprieved No. 68, where several of the craftsmen 'lived in': Copnall, for one, stayed there rent free on a £5 a week retainer. In this way, Wornum and his artists were able to experiment with and test new or unusual combinations of materials on site before committing themselves – the delightful effect of lighting Jutna's cut glass from within the balustrade of the hall staircase, for example, was

apparently achieved after much trial and error. Team lunches were held daily, with Miriam Wornum presiding at the end of a long table, and occasional cocktail parties celebrated the completion of phases of the work. This commitment to camaraderie was reminiscent of Lutyens in India, or more tellingly Ragnar Östberg in Stockholm. Later in life Miriam Wornum reminisced that at the time it felt like they were ‘building a medieval cathedral’.¹⁵⁴

As executed Wornum’s ‘cathedral’ presented a trinity of figurative sculptures around its altar of a giant main window set within finely cut ashlar. (The effect is perhaps more startling at night, thanks to the artificial lighting by Waldo Maitland.) Copnall’s symbolic central figure of *Architectural Inspiration* above the window, completed *in situ*, fails to recognize the unfussy quality of Wornum’s architecture; James Woodford’s more sensuous *Man* and *Woman* on pillars to either side are a better accompaniment (Ills 17.38, 17.39). The window itself was contentious, as it reveals clearly the essential second-floor steel girder behind. Beneath is a pair of giant cast-bronze entrance doors, decorated with a series of charming relief sculptures telling the story of ‘London’s river and its buildings’, again modelled by Woodford, to drawings prepared by J. D. M. Harvey (Ills 17.40, 17.45–46). Even the letterbox does not escape decoration, bearing a figure of *Mercury* by Seton White.¹⁵⁵ More symbolic figures by Copnall decorate the longer Weymouth Street frontage.

Inside, the entrance hall has a honey-coloured sheen from its yellow terrazzo floor slabs and polished limestone walls, incised with the names of RIBA Presidents and Gold Medallists (in lettering by Percy Smith). Witty floor panels designed by Copnall represent the paraphernalia of office work (a telephone, letters, a typewriter, books). But it is the staircase that is Wornum’s tour de force (Ill. 17.41). It is a dramatic space, dominated and held together by four giant fluted columns of green Ashburton marble, star-shaped in plan and without bases or capitals, that rise nearly 30ft to the coffered glass ceiling. Within them are the enormous stanchions of the steel frame, the elegant

proportions of which was one of the aspects of Wornum's design greatly admired at the time.¹⁵⁶ As elsewhere in the building, fine materials and craftsmanship contribute to the overall effect, with walls lined in limestone, risers and treads of black Derbyshire and blue Demara marble respectively, and above all Jan Juta's etched glass balustrade, lit by concealed tubular lights in its base (Ill. 17.42). The large etched-glass doors and giant window of the Henry Florence Memorial Hall, which echoes that of the façade, are also by Juta. The other main public and RIBA rooms in the building are as follows:

Henry Jarvis Hall and Foyer (lower ground floor). A teak-panelled basement lecture hall, named after a member who bequeathed money towards the decoration of the building, designed with a mechanical partition that can be raised or lowered to provide one large or two smaller spaces. Decorations include acoustic panels over the doors (by Copnall) and a large mural (by Copnall and Nicholas Harris) depicting the *Empire-wide scope of the RIBA*.

Henry Florence Memorial Hall (first floor). The RIBA's principal reception room, named after another former member, and designed by Wornum with his visit to Stockholm obviously very fresh in his mind (Ill. 17.43). Decoration is everywhere, with a patterned floor and splayed limestone piers carved with scenes of architecture through the ages (designed by Copnall), and several fine wall carvings (also by Copnall), including one showing Wornum and Maurice Webb deep in conversation under the watchful eye of Ragnar Östberg. On the ceiling are sculptures by Woodford depicting the various building trades (Ills 17.47, 17.48). Also in this room is a pine screen carved with twenty reliefs (by Denis Dunlop) representing culture and industry in India, Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand.

Gallery One (first floor). Designed as an exhibition and reception room, with sliding entrance doors panelled in a mix of Australian walnut, Indian laurel and rosewood, and bronze door handles in the form of RIBA lions (by Seton White). The ceiling has plaster panels illustrating the main

periods of English architecture and the floor has a decorative panel of flowers and animals (again by Copnall).

Aston Webb Committee Room. Perhaps uniquely this room has its walls lined with squares of pale buff kid leather.

British Architectural Library (third floor), accessed by a separate stair leading from the main staircase. Designed by Wornum in consultation with the RIBA's then librarian Bobby Carter, with Moderne curved ends to its bookcases, and originally with a colour scheme by his wife Miriam (recently restored) of steel bookshelves enamelled in blue and yellow, and a brown cork floor (Ill. 17/44).

Council Chamber and landing (fourth floor). Situated beside the upper (gallery) section of the library, the Council Chamber has often been considered a 'hostile' or 'adversarial' meeting room – once again dominated by various 'Empire' woods and veneers. The landing ceiling outside has plaster relief panels (by Morris Wiedman) and a fine engraved and sandblasted door leading to a roof terrace, with panels (designed by Raymond McGrath) representing the principal periods of Architecture.

After the war Wornum began planning a two-storey rooftop extension to No. 66 and the rebuilding of No. 68 next door as offices, as originally intended in 1929. By then RIBA membership had increased by some 154 per cent. In this work Wornum was assisted by his post-war partner Edward Playne, of Sir Aston Webb & Son, in an amalgamation of their two practices as Wornum & Playne. It was Playne (latterly of Playne & Lacey) who oversaw the building work in 1957–8 due to Wornum's retirement and death in 1957. New facilities included extra committee rooms, an exhibition foyer and a members' dining room on the upper floors. The additions matched closely the appearance and materials of the main building, from which they were stepped back slightly, and the revised roof extension was far less prominent than in Wornum's first

competition design. The same contractors, Ashby & Horner, were used as for No. 66.¹⁵⁷

Despite the modernity of Wornum's design, for many members 66 Portland Place even in its enlarged post-war guise was a stuffy, unwelcoming place, little frequented by the public, with 'the whiff of a gentleman's club'. Since then a gradual but concerted programme of improvement has accompanied a drive to open the building up and broaden its appeal to the 'lay' public. Only the most significant of these works are listed below but collectively they have done much to revive Wornum's original vision for the building, with a focus on the best of British craft and design.

The process began in the mid 1970s with alterations by Garnett Cloughley Blakemore & Associates that included revolving entrance doors and the use of part of the old reception and waiting area for an enlarged bookshop to attract visitors. To improve accessibility in May 1984 Wornum's entrance steps were removed and carefully crafted stone ramps and steps of the correct gradient for wheelchair users installed to a final design by Douglas Stephen & Partners. At the same time the courtyard outside Florence Hall was turned into a sculpture court, as originally intended by Wornum.¹⁵⁸ Since then the first-floor reception rooms have been refurbished (by Stanton Williams) and the Henry Florence Hall given an overhaul as a exhibition gallery and space for public hire (by James Soane of Conran & Partners).¹⁵⁹

The RIBA recently acquired No. 76 Portland Place for extra accommodation to relieve pressure on space at Nos 66-68 and bring together administrative staff from there and other satellite offices. A design competition in 2013 provoked controversy and criticism for its requirement that contestants should have a minimum turnover of around £350,000, thus excluding smaller firms, and for a lack of diversity in its judging panel. The RIBA relented on both counts and the 2010 Stirling Prize winners Patrick Theis & Soraya Khan were selected from a shortlist of six firms at the end of the year.¹⁶⁰

Nos 70–84

No eighteenth-century fabric survives in the long stretch of buildings north of the RIBA, having been redeveloped since the early years of the twentieth century, mostly with tall ranges of Edwardian flats.

Nos 70–74 is a skilfully designed block of Beaux-Arts ‘flats de luxe’ by Frank T. Verity, of 1911–13, but was only the first small sally of an intended comprehensive plan to redevelop this whole block between Weymouth and Devonshire Streets in the Parisian manner.¹⁶¹

Verity’s client was a local optician, George Paxton (of Curry & Paxton), who had acquired the lease of this site and also Nos 82–86, with much of the adjoining frontage on Devonshire Street. When a perspective of Verity’s design (by Walton) was published later, it showed a mammoth symmetrical composition of such flats at the centre (70–78) and both corners (62–66 and 82–86) of this long block, interspersed by Boehmer’s No. 80 and a similar-looking neo-Georgian house at No. 68.¹⁶² Paxton said he had acquired the Devonshire Street corner site at Verity’s suggestion, with the intention of selling it on to finance the central block, but was concerned at the lack of progress. He told the Howard de Walden estate in 1910: ‘I am not speaking in a detrimental manner when I say that his [Verity’s] optimistic views are not always realized’. Paxton was unhappy with Verity, whom he complained was too slow had been foisted on him by the Estate.¹⁶³

Paxton consoled himself by focusing on the acquisition of upmarket interior fittings, such as large mantelpieces and electric lights, and also laying out a ‘very superior’ rear garden. Verity thought him ‘extravagant’. The pair also tussled over the rooms on the bottom floor, which Paxton found hard to let to any but medical men as they were so low in the ground as not to comply with the LCC’s residential requirements – ‘Mr Verity should have known what was necessary’. In the end only 70–74 were erected to Verity’s designs.¹⁶⁴

Currently the Institute of Physics, **No. 76** (formerly 76 and 78) has been selected as a spill-over site for the expansion of the RIBA from Nos 66–68 and will be converted to office space for around 180 RIBA staff. It was originally built in 1958–9 on the site of two Adam houses as offices for the City & Guilds of London Institute, to designs by Howard V. Lobb & Partners. Part of the success of the sleek modernist Portland-stone facade is the restraint of its fenestration, the window openings having been kept small at the request of the Howard de Walden Estate to complement the adjoining buildings. Larger windows were allowed at the rear. Less sympathetic was the Estate's requirement for net curtains to be used in all front windows. Some flats were provided above new garages in the rear yard at Bideford Mews, where there was also a striking reinforced-concrete fire-escape stair decorated with pierced panels of ceramic brick, incorporating an air-ventilation inlet at its core (Ill. 17.48½).¹⁶⁵

The former house of 1905–6 at **No. 80** is one of the finest rebuildings in Portland Place (Ill. 17.49). Designed by Edward Boehmer (of Boehmer & Gibbs), its Portland stone Beaux-Arts façade is accomplished and precisely scaled; unlike the giant blocks of flats with which it rubs shoulders at this upper end of the street it benefits from being confined to a single plot.

Boehmer's clients were the building firm Matthews, Rogers & Company of Mayfair, one of the leading speculators on the Grosvenor Estate.¹⁶⁶ They acquired the lease in 1904 and began rebuilding by January 1905 with their architect-partner Maurice Charles Hulbert in charge of the design, taking as a model one of their recent houses at 42 Charles Street, near Berkeley Square. Frederick Stevenson, the Howard de Walden surveyor, was unhappy with the proposals, with the upshot that Boehmer, who seems to have been approached already over the rebuilding of the stables as a garage, was commissioned. Similarities remain between the executed design and the

more 'Wrenaissance' three-bay brick-and-stone façade of the Charles Street house.¹⁶⁷

Stevenson was also particular about details, inside and out. At the end of 1905 Boehmer prepared a full-size drawing of a capital for him and a plaster model was worked up to try out on site; this presumably related to the columns to the first-floor bow window or the giant order pilasters. In execution the capitals were said to be made of solid blocks of stone, modelled in situ. By January 1906 Boehmer had made tracings of the plasterwork ceilings for the main reception rooms, which the Howard de Walden Estate had prescribed should be in an Adam manner.

In plan the main floors were standard, with a dining room, library and morning room on the ground floor and connecting drawing rooms above. These latter were fitted out with oak panelling in an ornate Louis XV style, and there is a suggestion that this may have been at the request of the first occupant, Ernest Beckett, recently raised to the peerage in succession to his late uncle as 2nd Baron Grimthorpe. Lady Sackville noted in her diary that Grimthorpe had 'done up his new house in the Renaissance style, the mania that everyone has got in Paris now'.¹⁶⁸ Grimthorpe was followed at the house by: Sir William Petersen, shipowner (from 1916); Admiral Earl Jellicoe (from 1925); and Mark Ostrer, financier and film magnate (from 1929). Ostrer sold his lease after the war to the Institute of Transport, whose headquarters No. 80 remained until 2013 when it was acquired by the Institute of Physics, based next door at 76–78. The two buildings were then linked together by calfordseaden LLP in a £1.8m improvement that included the addition of a new 100-seat lecture theatre at the rear of No. 80.¹⁶⁹

No. 82. The Adam houses here (Nos 82 and 84) were demolished around 1913 by George Paxton, the developer of Nos 70–74, to make way for similar new flats by Trehearne & Norman (Ill. 17.50). Further designs followed in 1918 by Collcutt & Hamp. But it was not till well after the First World War, in 1922–4,

that rebuilding took place under a different developer, Charles Lee of Bognor, with William Kaula (of Wills & Kaula) as his architect. The development site also included the houses and mews buildings behind, at 49–53 Devonshire Street. As with many such blocks, the ground-floor apartment was configured to include a doctor's surgery. Upper-floor flats had their main rooms facing Portland Place and the best bedrooms ranged along Devonshire Street, with the kitchen, services and servants' room towards the rear. Several small servants' bedrooms were accommodated on the upper floor.¹⁷⁰

Nos 86–90

More interwar flats occupy the rest of the former Portland Estate ground north of Weymouth Street to the boundary with the Crown Estate. **No. 86**, with its entrance on the Weymouth Street return, was erected in 1926–8 to designs by the architect Philip Tilden in association with Trehearne & Norman for a specially created development company, Duncan House Ltd. This had evolved from an earlier concern, the Phoenix Building Co Ltd, in which Oliver Duncan had been associated with Charles Peczenik. A breakdown in Peczenik's health forced him to retire and endangered the project, and Duncan's father Sir Frederick (who was providing the money) was reluctant to proceed until his son found another builder 'of similar repute and experience' to work with. Trehearne & Norman, and the contractors Foster & Dicksee, seem to have been acceptable. Some revisions were made to the plans in order to bring the elevation more into line with Wills & Kaula's flats opposite at No. 82. Like many such blocks in the area, both share a prominent use of red brick on their return flanks.¹⁷¹

No. 88 belongs to the following decade, as is evident in its sleeker, leaner façade of smooth Portland Stone, with shallow bays and long rectangular

balconies, and none of the chunky neoclassical detailing of its older near neighbours (Ill. 17.51). Designed by Trehearne & Norman Preston & Co., it was the last of the big blocks of its type to be built in Portland Place, in 1934, before war brought the long flat-building boom, which was already in decline, to its end.¹⁷²

For Nos 92–98, part of the Park Crescent development, see Chapter 20.

West Side

Nos 1–15

The buildings at the very south end of Portland Place on this side, now comprising Nos 1–11, stand beyond the limits of the original Adam development, on land once part of the Foley House gardens and subsequently built up by John Nash as part of Langham Place; this explains their more forward building line.

Nos 1–1A, at the corner with Chandos Street, were erected in 1879–81 as six ‘residences’ or flats separated by floors of iron and concrete (Ill. 17.52). The architect was C. J. Phipps. The flats were mostly pre-let with a separate entrance to the rear for Henry John Jourdain, a colonial merchant and shipowner who had been based in Mauritius. The many stone decorative features with which the building was once replete – balconies, columns and gables to the dormer windows – have all gone and the interiors have been heavily modernized as offices. From 1952 to 1993 this was the home of BBC School Radio, as a plaque records. **No. 3** adjoining, now the Portuguese

Embassy, looks identical but is a post-1960 replica, war-time bomb damage having rendered the site empty.¹⁷³

No. 5, now also converted to offices, was built in 1910–12 as flats. Stone-fronted, it was designed by Percival V. Hawkins for the Town Properties Development Company. It is the only such block in the street to make good use of figurative sculpture, with a series of panels at the top representing the four seasons.¹⁷⁴

No. 7. Nash's five-bay house here of 1818–19 (page ###), long divided into two properties, was reunified, raised and converted in 1926–7 to provide care for wealthy clients as the Alfred House Nursing Home. This was established by Almina Wombwell, Countess of Carnarvon, with Baron Alfred de Rothschild as benefactor. Their architect was James John Sydney Naylor. The Home closed in 1939 and in 1949–56 the bomb-damaged building was largely rebuilt by Higgs & Hill Ltd with Ansell and Bailey architects as offices in front of a retained back wall and central staircase wing. The first-floor windows in the new stone front were subsequently raised to round heads. What came to be called Ability House was once again converted in 2012–14 by OSEL Architecture for Galliard Homes to form seven flats.¹⁷⁵

The tall block at **Nos 9–11**, with a stone-and-glass front raised on piloti, was built in 1964 to the designs of Clifford Culpin & Partners for the Laing Development Company as a British Council centre for overseas students, with flats above (Ill. 17.53). It replaced some garden ground attached to Chandos House and two apartment buildings on the site of Langham House: No. 11, a surprisingly utilitarian block of red-brick chambers of 1891 by the architect R. J. Worley; and Nos 11A–B, a six-storey block of 1908–10 by F. T. Verity for the developer Leon Peczenik. In 1966 a flat at 9–11 was taken by the Indian industrialist and philanthropist Swraj Paul (now Lord Paul of Marylebone)

and his wife when they were seeking treatment in England for their two-year old daughter Ambika, who was suffering from leukaemia. After her death Lord Paul bought the block and renamed it Ambika House in her memory. Now around half the flats are owned by Paul and his extended family, and in 2011 an unsightly eighth-floor caretaker's apartment was replaced with a modern luxury penthouse with a rooftop pool, designed for Lord Paul's son Angad by the architects Buckley Gray Yeoman. By then new glass curtain-walling had appeared on the lower floors as part of their conversion to a conference and training centre. Depressed at the collapse of the family business, Angad Paul jumped to his death from the penthouse in November 2015.¹⁷⁶

Next door, **No. 15** occupies the site of the southernmost pair of Adam houses, at 13 and 15, two of several in the street acquired in the early 1900s by Lord Waring in the hope of redeveloping with luxury flats; No. 13 was for many years his estate office. Instead the scheme finally advanced in 1946–9 after wartime delays and completed in 1960 was for the present eight-storey office block, clad in stone in a then old-fashioned stripped classical style, with a lower brick wing ranged along Duchess Street. The architect was Thomas Braddock, best known for some stylish 1930s cinemas. The lower floors now comprise the offices of Dolce & Gabbana.¹⁷⁷

Nos 17–25

These were the first sites to be leased, and among the earliest houses occupied, in 1778–84. That at the south corner (No. 17) was built by the Adams themselves. Its neighbour at No. 19 was one of several in the street leased to the plasterer Joseph Rose and all five houses in this short terrace contained excellent examples of his firm's work. Though much altered, the

three survivors at 17–21 are still good examples of the advanced manner of the first Portland Place houses.¹⁷⁸

No. 17, as an end house, had its outer bays accentuated by being stepped forward very slightly and a flank entrance on Duchess Street, to which the present porch and balcony were added in 1864; an original Adam fanlight survives within. In plan it is essentially a mirror of its partner at No. 25 (now demolished), with the entrance leading via an oblong vestibule to a sweeping curved stair on the opposite wall, and also to a front eating room and rear parlour, though here the latter is rectangular with splayed ends. The upstairs drawing rooms retain their ornate plaster ceilings, with good-quality paintings in the style of Cipriani or Zucchi, and, unusually, their friezes – designs for all of these are in Sir John Soane’s Museum.¹⁷⁹ At the rear on both floors was an octagonal boudoir. It was for this house that Adam designed the ornate chimneypiece and overmantel mentioned earlier (Ill. 17.54), for the first residents John Cornwall (d. 1800), a London merchant, and his wife. **No. 19** is similar, though of traditional side-passage plan, and here the Rose plasterwork extends to the stairwell, where there are scallops and garlands around the skylight, as well as guilloche bands and wall arabesques containing moulded plaques of dancing Bacchantes and other classical figures (Ill. 17.55). The drawing room ceilings here recall those in other houses in the street leased to Rose (Ill. 17.55a), but Adam office designs, made at the Adelphi in November 1775, survive for both. Early residents here in the 1780s and 90s included Lord Lisburne and Lady Templeton.

Of the three, **No. 21** stands out for its central pediment, later portico and the ingenious Adam geometric designs and painted panels of its first-floor ceilings, which are among the finest to survive in the street (Ill. 17.56). There are also good Adam friezes, a decorated stairwell and a genuine-looking plaster roundel on the chimney breast in the ground-floor eating room,

depicting Venus or perhaps the nereid Galatea riding a shell drawn by dolphins. The house was taken by General Sir Henry Clinton in the early 1780s.¹⁸⁰ Much of the other interior work is later revival and most likely introduced by Sir Archibald Edmonstone of Duntreath, 5th Bt, who made improvements in 1902–3. As brother to Alice Keppel, Edmonstone enjoyed a close relationship with Edward VII, and through her was able to let the house for £2,500 in 1905 to Mrs John Jacob Astor IV, one of several US hostesses happy to spend lavishly on a suitable London property for the season.¹⁸¹

Nos 23 and 25 were similar in design and planning to 17 and 19, though if anything even more abundantly decorated. No. 25, Lady Archer's house, displayed Robert Adam's fondness for experimental room shapes, with a circular ground-floor ante-room with four curved niches, more niches for statues in the vestibule and stairwell, and, as at No. 17, octagonal rear boudoirs or dressing rooms (see Ill. 17.6). Fitted library bookcases on the curved back wall of the rear drawing room were thought in 1907 to be original to the house, as they matched the doorcases, cornices and ceilings.¹⁸²

Despite their sumptuous interiors, Nos 23 and 25 were demolished in 1935 to accommodate a new headquarters building for the General Nursing Council for England & Wales (GNC), then based at Nos 20 and 22, opposite. This was a 'house swap' engineered by the BBC which, being eager to get its hands on 20–22 for extending Broadcasting House, offered to find a site for the GNC on the west side of Portland Place and contribute a lump sum towards rebuilding costs, and so acquired Lord Waring's lease to 23–25. Waring would have redeveloped several years earlier with luxury flats had the market been more favourable.¹⁸³

The new five-storey block, opened in 1937 as **23 Portland Place**, was of steel-framed construction, faced with Portland stone in a cool Beaux-Arts manner. Despite its height, its clean neoclassical lines are less intrusive among the Adam remains than many of its neighbours. Such was the exceptional

quality of the Adam work in the old houses that the architects, J. E. Newberry and C. W. Fowler, were asked to incorporate them in the new building wherever possible and design fittings to match. In the end it was mostly chimneypieces and mahogany doors that were deemed re-usable, though the fanlights from Nos 20 and 23 were incorporated as a glazed screen on the ground floor and above the new entrance respectively. Also, a series of decorative paintings of Bacchanalian and other scenes, thought to be by Cipriani, was salvaged from the drawing-room ceilings of Nos 23 and 25. Newberry and Fowler modelled their new Council Chamber ceiling on that of the front drawing-room at No. 25 so as to accommodate nine of these close to their original arrangement, distributing the rest among other rooms. The GNC later expanded into neighbouring buildings in this block and two further storeys were added at No. 23 in 1961–2; the building is now occupied by its successor body, the Nursing and Midwifery Council, established in 2002.¹⁸⁴

Nos 27–47

This long terrace is the best-preserved on the west side of the street, though it lacks its grand centrepiece – the stuccoed and decorated No. 37, once the townhouse of Lord Stormont, demolished along with No. 39 following war damage.

The eight houses of 27–41 were developed around 1777 under John Chambers, brother of the architect Sir William, who leased the ground from the Portland Estate and the Adam brothers in 1775. Chambers sublet individual plots to tradesmen, including the large centre plot back to the Adams. The site of the other three houses, at 43–47, was taken by William Ward, a Marylebone gentleman, and developed under him in a similar way.

Some houses had found buyers by 1779; others, like Nos 29 and 35, took another three or four years to be completed.¹⁸⁵

In 1921 the Swedish Legation, till then based at 73 Portland Place, took **No. 27** (and 1 Weymouth Mews) as its new offices and Minister's residence. As with similar corner sites, Adam had placed the entrance in the return flank, on New Cavendish Street, where a portico had been added (later improved and fully enclosed by J. Oldrid Scott for the fabulously wealthy Julius Beer in 1878). This led to a centrally-placed entrance hall, leaving the front of the house free for a full-width dining room. Above was an unusually large connecting suite of three drawing rooms, the rear one already converted to a main bedroom, suitable for state use.¹⁸⁶ To provide more offices the Legation's architects Niven & Wigglesworth replaced the stables and coach-house in the mews at the back with a new Chancellery wing facing New Cavendish Street, tricked out in a stock-and-red-brick Queen Anne style (completed 1922). A carved stone Swedish coat-of-arms was installed above the Chancellery door in its easternmost bay; this has been removed since 1973 when the entrance was relocated to the central bay. Other alterations to the main building in 1921-2 included the refitting of the dining room as a library, the raising of the front first-floor window cills back to their original height, and probably the recasting of the many of the reception rooms in a competent Adam Revival style; the plasterwork ceilings there are all of good quality but none matches the Adam office's designs for the house (Ill. 17.57).¹⁸⁷ After the war the Swedes annexed No. 29 (and 2 Weymouth Mews) next door, but the embassy later moved out to new premises at Montagu Square. The house at 27 still serves as the Ambassador's Residence.¹⁸⁸

Nos 29, 31 and 33 retain high-quality Adamesque interiors, most notably in their first-floor suites; all were completed between 1779 and 1783. At No. 29 the main rooms have been opened up on both floors to form extensive spaces

for entertaining or dancing, with abundant decorative plasterwork to the walls and ceilings. This looks like later revival work and is attributable to either Major-General Sir Arthur A. E. Ellis, equerry and close friend to the Prince of Wales (later Edward VII), who spent heavily on improvements in 1882; or Sir Edward P. Stracey, 7th Bt, for whom Robert Weir Schultz made alterations in 1912. Both Nos 31 and 33 had been converted to medical practice and maisonettes by the mid 1920s. A flat at No. 31 was taken by the crime writer Edgar Wallace for the last years of his life in 1928–32; part of *Four Just Men* is set in Portland Place.¹⁸⁹ Since 1965 this building has belonged to the Embassy of the People's Republic of China and is now their Visa Office.

No. 33 has one of the street's most opulently decorated entrance halls and staircase compartments, as well as drawing room ceilings and friezes, all by Joseph Rose & Company (Ill. 17.58). Adam office drawings for these are dated 1776 but the house was not finished until 1779, when the military engineer John Montresor and his wife Frances took up residence. Later occupants included the explorer Joseph Wyndham and his descendants (1791–1832), the 2nd and 3rd Earls of Sheffield (1832–44), the 4th and 5th Earls of Abergavenny and their families (1848–92), and the gin distiller and agriculturalist James (later Baron) Blyth (1892–1925). A lavish entertainer, on close terms with the Prince of Wales, prime minister and other leading politicians, Blyth made several alterations shortly after moving in which are still evident today. These include a top-lit panelled billiard room with coved sides at the back of the house, and a hydraulic wall between the two main ground floor rooms, which could be raised or lowered (with pictures still attached) depending on the occasion.¹⁹⁰ In the 1950s the house became the Sierra Leone High Commission but by the late 1980s had largely fallen into disuse and disrepair. The continuing civil unrest in Sierra Leone enabled the notorious British entrepreneur Edward Davenport to buy the house in controversial circumstances, and it thus became entangled in the court case

brought against him by the Serious Fraud Office for various illegal activities. It has since been sold again.¹⁹¹

No. 35 is distinguished from its neighbours by a glazed covered way and tented first-floor veranda. These were added in 1887 by Cutler & Co. for the Dowager Lady Howard de Walden, widow of the 6th Baron, who lived there with her son, the motoring pioneer the Hon. Evelyn Ellis and other family members in the 1880s–90s. The fanlight is original, and like others in the street resembles an early sketch design by Robert Adam. By 1937 the house had been taken by the International Broadcasting Co. Ltd (IBC), formerly of Hallam Street, for conversion to offices and recording studios with No. 37 adjoining. The staircase at No. 35 was removed for extra studio space and a lift installed in its place.¹⁹² But bomb damage to No. 37 forced a retrenchment at No. 35, where after the war the IBC blossomed into one of London's leading independent studios. Some exceptionally fine Adam drawing-room ceilings and friezes, corresponding to the office drawings in the Soane museum, were still in place in 1944 when they were photographed by Herbert Felton. The studios were acquired in 1978 by the popular music mogul Chas Chandler and rebranded the Portland Recording Studios, and again in the 1980s by Don Arden of Jet Records as a vehicle for his son Daniel Levy. Artistes who recorded at No. 35 during its IBC–Portland heyday included Lonnie Donegan, Cream, Jimi Hendrix, the Rolling Stones and The Who.¹⁹³

The highlight of the terrace, and indeed the street, was the pedimented and stuccoed 'Great House' (as the Adams called it) at **No. 37** (Ill. 17/59). This was one of three sites retained by Robert and James Adam and developed by William Adam & Co. as a speculation. Once completed in 1777 it was mortgaged for £5,000 by all four brothers to the banker William Denne, but then sold the following year to the Lord Stormont for £8,000.¹⁹⁴ The façade was notable for its stucco decorations, which mirrored those of the surviving

pair of central houses opposite at Nos 46–48, though evidently this was already failing by 1793 when James Adam was urging its replacement.¹⁹⁵

Inside was one of the most elaborate interiors of Portland Place, as at Chandos House, designed and fitted out by the Adams in the hope of attracting a glamorous buyer. A grand central staircase led to a suite of three interconnected first-floor drawing rooms, two of which were arranged in ‘L’ formation at the front of the house. There was also an oval room at the rear on this floor, behind the stair compartment, with a bow window overlooking the yard and mews. All the reception rooms were finely decorated with plasterwork ceilings incorporating numerous Zucchi-esque painted panels (Ills 17.59, 17.60).¹⁹⁶ Lord Stormont, later 2nd Earl Mansfield in succession to his father, remained at the house until his death in 1796 and was followed by his son, the 3rd Earl, whom employed Edward Blore to make changes in 1830. Later occupants include Sir William Roger Palmer, 4th Bt, of Co. Mayo (1840s–60s), for whom elaborate decorations and additions were designed in the early 1840s by J. B. Papworth; the merchant banker George Charles Raphael (1890s–early 1900s); and the banker, businessman and politician Alban Gibbs, 2nd Baron Aldenham (1900s–30s).¹⁹⁷

When war broke out No. 37 was requisitioned and with 39 next door was intended in April 1940 for occupation by the Polish Government but a direct hit by high-explosive bombs in October that year ‘practically demolished’ both houses. After the war the remains were removed for luxury flats of 1957–8 at 37 (Winsley Court) and 39, with small houses in lower blocks in Weymouth Mews behind, beyond a central courtyard. Though built as an entity, mostly in a minimalist pale brick style, the main façades were intended to replicate those of the old houses at the time of their destruction (i.e. with later additions such as the porch and upper storey) – though any sense of proportion was lost by the insertion of an extra floor at *piano nobile* level. The architects were Richardson & McLaughlan, on behalf of the IBC.¹⁹⁸

No. 41, another of the 1770s houses built under John Chambers, was first occupied in 1779 until his death in 1787 by General Thomas Gage, the former commander-in-chief of forces in North America, recalled early in the War of Independence. Alterations were made for Edward Bootle-Wilbraham, Lord Skelmersdale (later 1st Earl of Lathom) in the 1870s–80s (the latter after a spectacular gas explosion blew out all the windows), and Lord Clinton, Under-Secretary of State for India, in the 1890s; but the greatest changes came during the long residence of the last private owner, Evelyn, Dowager Lady Alington, widow of Henry Gerard Sturt (d.1904), the 1st Baron, in 1904–39. She introduced antique marble chimneypieces, mahogany double doors and many other fittings, including wall decorations in the principal rooms by Jacksons, copied from James Wyatt’s elaborate plasterwork at Crichel House, the Sturt family’s Dorset seat. These have now gone, perhaps being among the period pieces removed from the house by John Scott-Ellis, the new Lord Howard de Walden, to Wonham Manor, Betchworth, Surrey, after the war. The Adamesque plasterwork ceilings in the reconfigured drawing rooms appear to predate her occupation. In 1947 No. 41 was taken by the The Ciba (later Novartis) Foundation, a scientific and educational charity, as its headquarters and is now occupied by its successor body, the Academy of Medical Sciences, for whom a £5m redevelopment as a conference and events venue was undertaken in 2008–10 (by Burrell, Foley & Fischer, architects).¹⁹⁹

No. 43 was completed around 1779 and let to Nathaniel Sanderson, a mason also active in Bedford Square. Its first private occupant in 1780 was a Lady Bernard; later residents included Admiral Sir John Poo Beresford, illegitimate son of the marquis of Waterford, in the 1830s–40s; and Captain Frederick Thomas Penton, a son of Henry Penton of Pentonville, in the 1900s. Penton spent heavily on improvements in 1909 and to him can be attributed the bay window in the rear wing and many of the alterations in the first-floor drawing rooms.²⁰⁰

After war the house was converted to offices with apartments above. Inside, recent restoration work for the current lessees, the Architects' Benevolent Society, revealed the original Adam drawing-room ceilings – badly damaged for wiring and trunking – hidden beneath post-war suspended ceilings. They have since been restored, along with other original fixtures and fittings, such as the floorboards, skirting, dado and shutters. Excavations for remedial work to the hearth and chimneypiece wall in the front drawing room revealed much about the Adams' builders' methods of construction (Ill. 17.62). There is also an anthemion-style balustrade in the staircase, presumably based on those at Kenwood and Osterley; the fanlight over the entrance door is a replica of c.1980, by the Survey of London draughtsman John Sambrook.²⁰¹

No. 45 was first occupied from 1782 until his death in 1812 by the art collector Edward Knight of Wolverley, a cousin of Richard Payne Knight of Downton. Knight was the first connoisseur to take a particular interest in John Flaxman, and as a result his houses in Portland Place and at Wolverley were both filled with the young sculptor's early works, including several chimneypieces, statues and plaster casts. A beautiful statuary marble chimneypiece, designed by Flaxman for No. 45 (then numbered 52) in 1782, was recently in the salerooms.²⁰² The house has been occupied since the mid 1950s by the Kenyan High Commission, with an official residence on upper floors. By then the Adam stair had already been replaced by a heavy carved oak staircase and balustrade, installed around 1907 at the same time as a library and billiard wing was added at the rear, with recessed oak bookcases and heavy oak mantels, the work of W. D. Caroe. Further alterations were made in 1917 by W. Henry White, including new, taller hardwood doors between the first-floor reception rooms. The house was restored and refurbished in 1988–9 by John Assael & Partners. Much internal decorative work was retained and with the advice of paint historian Ian Bristow an Adam colour scheme was

reintroduced. Assaels also succeeded in saving the curved rear five-storey bay, which had been in danger of collapse.²⁰³

Since 1923 **No. 47** has been the Polish Embassy (see Ill. 17/63). Its main ground-floor rooms today still bear the hallmarks of a comprehensive redecoration scheme in a mix of French and Georgian Revival styles. This probably dates from 1912–14, when the industrialist and politician Sir Arthur Basil Markham (d. 1916), formerly at No. 48, acquired the lease and spent around £14,000 on improvements. A first-floor drawing-room suite in an unusual ‘Chinese’ style may likewise be attributable to Markham, or his widow. Markham’s predecessor at the house in 1902–6 had been Field-Marshal Lord Roberts, one of Britain’s most decorated military commanders, to whom a rectangular stone commemorative plaque was added to the façade by the LCC in 1922, shortly before the Polish Government took possession. An extended rear wing has been added along Devonshire Street.²⁰⁴

Nos 49–69

Nos 49–51, Chinese Embassy. The destruction of the listed Adam houses on this site to allow the Chinese to erect a new embassy in their place in the 1980s is the sorriest of the many sad tales connected with Portland Place’s historic architecture. The outcome was all the more controversial for occurring entirely peaceably in an era of building conservation and with British government approval.²⁰⁵

Both houses were built in 1781–5 by the Westminster carpenter James Gibson. No. 49, being at the corner with Weymouth Street, was the end ‘pavilion’ of a long palace-fronted terrace and was designed by the Adams to be slightly advanced from its neighbours, with a stuccoed façade and four giant order Ionic pilasters (Ills 17.64, 17.65). It became the town house of the

5th Earl of Shaftesbury after his marriage in 1786 and remained in his family's ownership into the mid nineteenth century, by which time it had gained a large Doric entrance porch. Later tenants included the French Ambassador (1825–30) and Belgian Minister (1860).²⁰⁶ The house became the Chinese Legation in 1877. In October 1896 the exiled revolutionary Sun Yat-Sen was kidnapped by Imperial agents and held prisoner there, his escape from almost certain death being secured by his former tutor Dr James Cantlie, with the help of the prime minister, Lord Salisbury.²⁰⁷

After the Second World War the Chinese annexed No. 51 and in 1948 appointed the Sir Patrick Abercrombie and Richard Nickson to oversee the uniting of the two properties, with a new hall and single entrance at 49. But then came the culmination of the Chinese Civil War and the communist transformation of mainland China under Mao Zedong, which saw the embassy close in 1950. Not till 1954, after the Korean War had ended, did Mao's People's Republic agree to station a chargé d'affaires in Portland Place.²⁰⁸ Tensions ran high between Britain and China during Mao's Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution with the sacking by Red Guards in 1967 of the British mission in Peking and running street battles in Portland Place between axe-wielding Chinese officials and British police and passers-by.²⁰⁹

By then the Chinese were complaining of lack of space and structural problems, and in 1969 the embassy staff moved out to 31 Portland Place, leaving Nos 49–51 empty. They insisted both houses were in danger of collapse, though a joint inspection by various British officials found little wrong beyond surface cracks and dry rot, and noted many fine surviving Adam interiors and fittings. A formal application to demolish and rebuild followed in 1972 but the Environment Secretary Geoffrey Rippon quickly called in the plans, taking the decision out of Westminster Council's hands and averting a public inquiry. From the outset the Chinese chargé d'affaires sought Foreign Office assistance with the rebuilding and there is no doubt that DoE staff felt 'maximum co-operation' was expected of them at a time

when international relations were improving, with the Chinese authorities releasing British detainees and agreeing to help rebuild the British embassy in Peking. In 1973 the Foreign Secretary Sir Alec Douglas-Home wrote to Rippon, urging a speedy and favourable response to the Chinese Embassy's application to demolish.²¹⁰

Rippon's eventual decision later that year was to allow demolition and rebuilding behind the existing façades on condition that many internal features – including staircases, balustrades, mahogany doors, moulded plaster first-floor ceilings and chimneypieces – were to be salvaged and incorporated in the new embassy. It took another four years, till 1978, for plans by the Legation's architects (Arthur A. Stewart and Colin Penn with Floyd Slaski & Partners) to be accepted by the DoE. However, despite the Secretary of State's insistence, the façades were demolished as unstable and all the internal historic fabric was lost, stolen or destroyed during and after that process in 1980. Penn, for one, seemed happy, stating that there was never any question of reinstating historic fittings such as the staircase, as it would have clashed with his new design. Also, believing the old houses to be by James Adam he dismissed them as the work of a 'pretty inferior' architect.²¹¹ But the loss of the Adam façades left him and his clients with an obligation to reconstruct them in facsimile. The GLC's Historic Buildings' Committee Chairman, Willie Bell, opined that if an embassy needed a modern office block rather than a listed building, then 'it would make more sense to provide it in the first place and save London's dwindling heritage in the process', but he perhaps underestimated the importance the Chinese authorities attached to the connection of Sun Yat Sen with the site. The only winner (besides the Chinese diplomats) was the architectural collector Charles Brooking, who over a period of a week was able to retrieve hand-carved window shutters, architraves, balustrades, fanlights and other features, including apparently the entire front entrance, from a skip in front of the site.²¹²

Though the new building, completed in 1985 by Wates Construction under a £4.1m contract, paid lip service to its predecessors as required by the DoE, it was little more than pastiche (Ill. 17.67). The use of brick, with stucco reserved only for the pilasters and ground-floor rustication, was in the belief that this was how the Adam house had looked originally, though it is likely that No. 49 and its corresponding pair at No. 69 had both been stuccoed entirely. The enforced historicist style was simply unable to cope with the great bulk of the building and increased floorspace now required by the Chinese, especially on the prominent return flank to Weymouth Street and in the tall mansard roof extension – habitually referred to as an ‘excrescence’ by the Royal Fine Art Commission in its correspondence with the architects.²¹³ A further ugly roof extension with much barbed wire and a large satellite dish has not improved matters.

The large block of smart mid 1930s flats at **No. 55**, by J. Stanley Beard & Walter R. Bennett, architects, replaced a trio of Adam houses numbered 53–57, and mews buildings at 38–40 Devonshire Close. As such it was the most unsympathetic of several inter-war redevelopment schemes in Portland Place, slicing harshly through the central pediment shared with Nos 59–61 (Ills 17.68, 17.69). Promotional literature for the flats paid respect to the street’s ‘stately and beautiful’ old period houses, ‘of necessity, passing from existence’. That ‘necessity’ was a matter of simple economy: ‘Expensive – No! When it is remembered that the rents quoted include rates, taxes, central heating and constant hot water, also that in a flat at least one maid can be dispensed with’. There were four types of flat, usually of four or five bedrooms. The two most expensive, with (inter alia) a large entrance hall, two reception rooms and three bathrooms in addition to five bedrooms, were intended for medical men and were given separate entrances (numbered 53 and 57) either side of the main door. Communal facilities included a ‘Padda’ tennis court in the basement.²¹⁴

The pair at **Nos 59 and 61**, now in use as a primary school, was built with the adjoining houses at 53–57 (demolished) and 63–69 around 1791, when the first occupants, John Ellis FRS FLS and the politician (Sir) Henry St John Mildmay, took up residence.²¹⁵ Part of the central group of this terrace, their pediment has not been raised like others, only butchered by the adjoining flats at 55. Though there are still a few exceptionally fine Adam fittings, both houses bear signs of heavy early twentieth-century refurbishment in a mix of early Georgian, Adam Revival and florid Louis styles. Much of this work at No. 59, including a new staircase balustrade, was by Walter Sarel, who made extensive alterations there for James Gerstley in 1910–11 and also for Mrs Shewell Creek in 1928. At No. 61 similar improvements were made for Hillier Holt, a director of the United Tobacco Companies, who spent £2,000 on the property when he took up the lease in 1910. The two houses were first knocked together after the war for the Mount Vernon Hospital and Radium Institute.²¹⁶

Nos 63 and 65 are now in use as the Westminster/Fitzrovia branch of the Southbank International School. The first resident at No. 63 was the diplomat and author John Strange (d. 1799).²¹⁷ The house has been modernized on several occasions but is of interest for its historical connections. The explorer Sir Felix Booth (of the gin family) was a resident here in the 1840s, when he helped finance Captain John Ross's expedition to the north-west passage (Ross named the Gulf of Boothia and Felix Harbour after him). Later residents include the writer Francis Hodgson Burnett in the 1890s and early 1900s; and the Conservative politician Keith (later Lord) Joseph was born here in 1918. When the two houses were combined in 1957 for use by the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants, a flat at the top was occupied by its Secretary Derek Du Pré, who had a soundproofed room constructed there for the use of his daughter, the cellist Jacqueline Du Pré (d. 1987).

No. 67, one of the later houses in the street, not completed till around 1797, stands out for its stuccoed front and taller upper storey heights but these were probably original features of the Adam composition, as the same was also true of Nos 49 and 51, at the other end of this terrace (since demolished, see Ill. 17.64). After the war this house was taken over by the RAF Benevolent Fund at a fixed low rent as its new headquarters. The buildings underwent considerable rebuilding and improvement on behalf of the Fund in 2010–12.

The bulky white-brick Italianate corner house at **No. 69**, with an entrance portico on Devonshire Street, is a complete rebuilding of 1871–2 by William Cubitt & Company for Colonel Adrian Elias Hope (Ill. 17.70). A grandson of the Regency dilettante Thomas Hope and head of the family banking house, A. E. Hope lived here for only a few years with his first wife, the Lady Ida Louisa, a daughter of the Earl of Fife, before their separation and divorce around 1874. They were succeeded in the 1870s–90s by the statesman George Joachim Goschen (later 1st Viscount Goschen).²¹⁸ The house was taken by the Turkish government as its embassy and minister's house in 1901. The embassy moved to Belgrave Square in 1954 and 69 Portland Place remains in use as the Turkish Ambassador's Residence.

Nos 71–75

Of the old houses here, originally the northernmost on this side of Portland Place, only No. 75 remains. The row was built c.1790, William Woolcott, a Titchfield Street carpenter, being the first lessee of Nos 71 and 75. At around 26–27ft, these two houses were narrower than those further south, but No. 73 was a double-fronted five-bay mansion of nearly 50ft frontage. It was first taken in 1791 by the naval veteran Admiral Sir Edward Hughes. Being so

close to Weymouth Street there was no room behind for coach-houses and stables, which were provided instead in Devonshire Mews East. Whereas the Adams gave the three matching houses opposite at 86–90 six Ionic pilasters supporting a pediment, shared between them, here a similar central feature was confined to No. 73 (see Ill. 17.5). An entrance portico was built there in 1870 for a later owner, the 9th Earl of Southesk; another was added at No. 71 in 1906. Before the construction of Park Crescent in 1812–13, **No. 75** had windows in its north wall, looking across to Marylebone Park. Its interior today suggests much high-quality redecoration in an Adam Revival style, perhaps of the 1870s for Lord Southesk, or more likely of the 1880s for his successor, Colonel Stanley Bird, Chairman of the Board of St Mary's Hospital, Paddington, who spent £900 on alterations when he took up the lease in 1882–3.²¹⁹

Today at **No. 73** is another of Lord Waring's ubiquitous and overlarge 1920s blocks of flats in the Beaux-Arts style, in this instance by William Kaula of Wills & Kaula, one of his favourite architects. Waring wanted to acquire all three Adam houses to maximize his profits but in the end was restricted to a single-house scheme. The new block was approved by the LCC in 1927 and construction proceeded in 1928–30. Two smaller flats occupied the ground floor, either side of a central main hall and stairs, but the larger, upper apartments were arranged one to each floor. Waring's biggest problem was getting light into flats on such a 'land-locked' site and took advice on this aspect from fellow developer Charles E. Peczenik, who had recently built similar blocks in Hallam and Mansfield Streets. The adjoining flats at **No. 71** followed around 1938 under a different developer, this time to designs by E. A. Stone, though his frontage was arranged so as to merge as far as possible with its neighbour. Facilities here included a basement restaurant.²²⁰

Nos 77–81 were built in 1812–13 by the Crown Estate along with Park Crescent, with which they are discussed in Chapter ##.