

CHAPTER 20

Park Crescent

The Park Crescent of today is a post-war replica. A combination of poor original building methods, wartime damage and heavy-handed reconstruction policies has left little or no old fabric from the 'semi-circus' conceived by John Nash and built with much difficulty between about 1812 and 1822. Even that was only half of the full circus Nash had planned. Yet despite those early failures, despite also its present lack of authenticity, Park Crescent remains one of London's most memorable episodes of urban planning (Ill. 20.1).

The one substantial survival of historic fabric, a large ice-well believed to predate the Park Crescent development, is at the back of the crescent, in Park Crescent Mews West.

The Planning of Regent's Circus

Three colonnaded circuses featured in John Nash's immortal scheme to link Whitehall and Westminster with Marylebone Park by way of what became Regent Street, as first published in 1811. All occupied critical junctures or points of transition, where traffic-ridden east-west routes broke the new line of procession, for Nash believed that the circus form invested such crossings with dignity and lessened the psychological sense of a barrier – something he strove to overcome so as to make the Crown's developments around Regent's Park feel accessible and eligible to Londoners of high standing.

Confusingly, all three *rond-points* went at first by the informal name of Regent or Regent's Circus. Piccadilly Circus and Oxford Circus, carved laboriously out of existing building fabric by compulsory purchase under the New Street Act of 1813, had to be quite small and in the event lacked the colonnades Nash had hoped for. Both have long gone, and though Oxford Circus survives as a concept, it is higher and slightly wider than Nash's original creation.

The third Regent's Circus was to be different altogether. Over 700ft in diameter, it came at the point where the city eased into a gracious modern suburb, beyond the final obstacle of the New (now Marylebone) Road (Ill. 20.2). But the shape and texture of that suburb shifted greatly over the years of its creation, with implications for the third circus. So much can be gathered from the fate of a fourth circus, the largest of all, devised by Nash as a central focus for Regent's Park. Marked the Great Circus on the plan of 1811, when bands of continuous housing were anticipated within the park as well as on its periphery, it was then reserved for concentric terraces. Ultimately it acquired a bare smattering of villas and became the Inner Circle, a low-key feature in the park landscape. With the opening-out of that landscape in the 1820s and the failure to develop the northern sector of the third circus, Park Crescent turned into a prelude to the park rather than the transitional interlude Nash intended.¹

If the 700ft circus was the most striking of the crop in town-planning terms, it was also among the first elements of the Office of Woods and Forests' plan for Regent Street and Regent's Park to be implemented. Its site was Crown farmland in hand, the expiration of the old leases in 1811 having given impetus to the whole long-meditated development of Marylebone Park. So it could be started even before the New Street Act authorized the complete scheme in 1813. Not surprisingly, Nash invested energy and urgency in getting it going.

The ground in question consisted of Dupper or Harley Field, the southernmost portion of the Crown's Marylebone or Marybone Park Farm and its only portion south of the New Road, and part of Saltpetre Field to its north, some of which had been dug for gravel. Dupper Field was ripe for development. By 1790 it had become bottled in on all but the New Road side by building on the Portland estate; to its south, Harley Street near its south-west corner and Portland Place further east stopped at fences on the field boundary. It was always assumed that Harley Street would be protracted northwards over Crown land up to the New Road if not beyond. Portland Place was rather different. Its exceptional width had been governed by the legal judgement of 1767 that the view northwards from Foley House must remain unobstructed. Nor did the Portland authorities or the residents of its exclusive houses favour any development which would lead to its becoming a thoroughfare to the New Road.

By dividing the roadways of what became Park Crescent, Nash inflected the connection and left greenery along the cherished axis of Portland Place. (In this respect as in others his plan showed greater subtlety than its forebear of 1809 by the 3rd Duke of Portland's surveyor, John White, which provided for a 'Grand Crescent' north of the New Road but simply filled in Dupper Field with a rigid continuation of the Portland grid.) As to the anxiety that Harley Street and Portland Place would become shortcuts for New Road traffic, the New Street Act specified that the fences should be replaced by lodges and gates. Together with the answering lodges and gates into the park on the north side of the road at the bottom of Park Square, these ensured that New Road freight stayed within bounds, while bona fide Portland estate residents were authorized to pass through all the gates into the amenities of Marylebone Park. The southern gates at the top of Park Crescent survived until 1888 (west side) and 1894 (east side).²

One other factor affected the pre-planning of the circus. That was the vexed issue of a site for the new Marylebone parish church. From at least 1809

there had been talk of building this church on the anticipated Crown developments, and a Vestry committee had chosen a site in Dupper Field next to the New Road and on axis with Portland Place as their preference. Nash evidently deprecated that choice, which raised questions as to how the church would relate to Portland Place, the New Road, the houses round the circus and the green space envisaged at its centre, and whether it would be regarded as infringing the Foley House clause. In his second plan of 1812 Nash proposed isolating the church in the centre of the garden and diverting the New Road round the circumference. But he was soon able to derail the whole scheme through cunning and obstructiveness, to the Vestry's dudgeon.³ He was left with the geometrical task of realigning the New Road so that it crossed the circus symmetrically rather than at a slight slant. That took place in due course at Crown expense.

Charles Mayor and his failure, 1812–17

By the end of 1811 the hunt was on for a single builder brave and resourceful enough to take on both the whole of the circus, where Nash envisaged large first-rate houses, and the extension of Harley Street, for which he proposed brick-faced houses on narrower frontages. By March 1812 he had hooked his fish. 'Mr Mayor is willing to adopt the elevation I proposed to him which is to encircle the whole with a collonade of coupled columns surrounded [sic] by a ballustrade', he told his masters at the Woods and Forests. 'I consider this Step with Mayor as most important and I sincerely hope there will be no hitch from the Duke of Portland'.⁴

Charles Mayor had started out as a jobbing carpenter and undertaker. In 1800 he successfully took over the north side of Brunswick Square from James Burton and built other houses near by, including the Pavilion in what is now Handel Street, probably a detached villa and occupied by Mayor himself

(perhaps for want of a grander tenant). His subsequent ventures before he embarked on the circus were bitty. Several were in Marylebone, where he built some houses in Gloucester Place, lived at different dates in Welbeck Street and Spanish Place, and had a yard in Somerset Street. When he took on the circus, he had just sold a house in Upper Brook Street, Mayfair, to the economist David Ricardo. More to the point, he and Nash had been collaborating over a house in Foley Gardens south of Portland Place, from which Mayor emerged with the freehold interest. Though Mayor owned a library including such technical books as Rees's *Cyclopaedia*, he was not a man of much sophistication. According to one of his workmen 'he professed to be a Surveyor but I considered him to be a Carpenter'.⁵ He may have been recommended to Nash by Burton or S. P. Cockerell, under whom he had probably worked in Brunswick Square and Upper Brook Street.

By May 1812 Nash and Mayor had worked out a detailed plan and schedule. Together they increased the diameter of the circus to 724ft, giving some houses frontages of up to 100ft (each up to five windows wide) but in consequence making them shallower and cramping the mews spaces behind. The timetable stipulated the first roofings-in and issuing of leases at the southern end to be by August 1814 and the final ones in the northern sector by August 1816. Nash projected Mayor's overall outlay at about £300,000 and urged the Crown authorities to buy the improved ground rents so as to guarantee his liquidity. Mayor got the final go-ahead in July. Soon afterwards Nash was arranging to show his whole plan to the Prince Regent, telling Alexander Milne of the Woods and Forests: 'It will be very impolitic not to pursue this course if we wish HRH to take up the measure con amore and ungracious since HRH has signified his wishes not to gratify him, and particularly so as other public works with which he is not connected are eager to dignify them with HRH['s] name'.⁶

Mayor got going fast enough to ask for his first leases between December 1812 and August 1813. These concerned the southernmost houses

on both sides of Regent's Circus and also some smaller brick-fronted ones which were to connect Portland Place with the circus (Nos 77–81 on the west and 92–96 on the east). Here adjustments had to be made to placate the owners of the previous northernmost houses, which lost their view. Though these leases were duly issued, little finishing work can have taken place within the carcasses (Ill. 20.4). For financial reasons Mayor evidently hoped to secure as many leases as he could as fast as might be. To that end he appears to have embarked upon the cellars of almost the whole of the southern semi-circus (as Nash called it) and even to have done some excavation on the northern side of the New Road. According to James Elmes, the work there extended to building the foundations and coal-vaults of the western quadrant. Mayor also carried out much of the infrastructure work, for which he was paid directly by the Crown. West of the circus, an agreement was struck early in 1813 for the Harley Street continuation, provisionally to be called Ulster Street.⁷

Then things started to unravel. With the Napoleonic Wars reaching their climax, it was a bad time for builders. Few people were in the market for houses, yet building materials were going up in price. Mayor seems to have done nothing elaborately tricky: with Nash egging him on, he just miscalculated and was drawn into one of the severest bankruptcies in London building history. His slow-down during 1813 must have been well noted. 'Every stimulus should be applied to Mr Mayor to complete his Circus,' urged Nash in a report to the Commissioners on changes planned for the park that December, 'which will carry that character of respectable building into the heart of the Park and tempt the higher classes of society to come there'.⁸

The first half of 1814 saw little progress apart from an intended pub (stipulated as the only one on the development) built by James Smith of Norton Street on back land between Harley Street and the circus. That April, when James Burton at the instance of Mayor's creditors made a valuation of his holdings 'according to the reduced value of buildings at the day', the

writing was on the wall. In the autumn Mayor appealed to the Woods and Forests for a loan, admitting 'I am absolutely at a Stand Still'. Nash, asked for advice, reported just before Christmas with his usual optimism that with eleven houses covered in, another six up to the chamber floor, excavation in some state of forwardness for the whole circus and a million and a half bricks on site, the developer ought to have enough security to win through: 'if the half circus can be completed in the course of the next year (I mean externally) ... his speculation will have a favourable issue'. With the Crown declining to lend, vary terms or purchase ground rents, the creditors deemed otherwise. Mayor was carted off to the Fleet Prison early in 1815 and the grindstones of bankruptcy began to turn.⁹

Like other bankrupts Mayor was allowed out on day release, and made efforts to realize assets. He managed to let the Foley Gardens house, but a severe injury incurred while inspecting one of the Regent's Circus houses in February 1816 cannot have helped. One bankruptcy commission superseded another. So persistent was the post-war slump that Mayor's assignees were wary of trying to finish the speculation themselves and disappointed when they tried to sell off assets.¹⁰ Meanwhile the carcasses in sundry states of scruffiness and dereliction scared off buyers.

Park Crescent completed, 1817-21

Testifying to the Select Committee on Crown Leases in 1829, the architect and surveyor to the Eyre Estate John Shaw claimed that it was thanks to 'a very extraordinary man, Mr. Farquhar', who put money in as a speculation, that building resumed at what was to become Park Crescent. This was the former East India Company's gunpowder contractor John Farquhar, who lived in the New Road near Marylebone parish church. Farquhar died in 1826 leaving a good deal of property in the vicinity of Park Crescent, but no further evidence

of his involvement has come to light.¹¹ In 1817 the Great Portland Street builder William Richardson, apprised that Mayor's assignees were not going to complete the development themselves, sought terms for both the Harley Street continuation and for finishing the western half of the crescent, where foundations were already partly laid.¹² A bigger, City-based contractor, Henry Peto, then bought the three carcasses on the east side of Portland Place (Nos 92-96), completing them 'in the first style of elegance', and went on to take most of the eastern quadrant, excepting the tip, assigned to Samuel Baxter, and the corner house No. 15. Peto bought the ground rent for this last from a mortgagee, but the house itself was evidently completed by Mayor's assignees, who decided to sell it in 1820. As described in 1823, it was fitted up with stone staircases, 'costly marble chimneypieces', and scagliola pillars in the 42ft-long dining room.¹³ In the early stages Peto was hampered by the collapse of a party wall between two of the Portland Place houses during a storm in March 1818. There had been a bad fire in one of these in 1814, on which Nash blamed the fall. Peto was adamant that the houses had been built with bricks 'mostly of the very worst description and totally unfit for use', and laxly supervised - accusations that have haunted the Nash developments and Park Crescent in particular ever since - and commissioned an independent report to prove it. 'I must beg to be allowed to treat the insinuations of my inattention and that of my clerks with contempt', riposted Nash, adding that Peto ought to have noted the state of the houses when he bought them.¹⁴

On both sides of the crescent, finishing off Mayor's carcasses generally preceded the building of the other houses. The western crescent went up mainly in 1819-20; at the same time Richardson undertook the east side of Upper Harley Street, essentially following the original Nash-Mayor plan. Judging from a sketch of Park Crescent in July 1820, Peto had as yet made little or no progress with his side. Beyond Mayor's houses at Nos 13-15 the eastern quadrant was just excavated ground and derelict-looking pavement

vaults, while No. 13 was ruinous with bare roof timbers and fallen brickwork – lending credibility to Peto’s claims. Perhaps the last of the houses to be started were Baxter’s at Nos 1–6, the first two of which were still in carcase in July 1821.¹⁵ These had an amenity the other houses lacked, of long private gardens backing on to Portland Road (Great Portland Street). The whole can have been barely finished when Ackermann published his prospect of ‘The Crescent, Portland Place’ in 1822 (Ill. 20.3).

The name ‘Park Crescent’ is first encountered the year before.¹⁶ By then it was abundantly clear that the half-circus north of the New Road would never go ahead. Ideas about the form of the park had radically changed, with a greater openness of landscape prevailing. Around 1820 Nash therefore scrapped the northern crescent altogether in favour of Park Square, straight-sided with an open north end.¹⁷ As a result Park Crescent offers a hint of how the terraces round and within the park might have looked before Nash gave them a more monumental post-war look.

The crescent furnished the park, the New Road and indeed London as a whole with a fresh and uplifting piece of unified urban scenery. Its semi-circular profile, albeit only half what had been planned, offered a decisive depth of sweep which an elliptical crescent would have lacked. On closer inspection the composition, as often with Nash, was sleek but shallow. Minimal projections and pediments at the ends do something to relieve the simple economy of the plastered elevations (originally in Roman cement, Bath-stone-coloured, with the jointing perhaps sharper than it is today). But the main compositional trick is the enfilade of the continuous ground-storey colonnade with coupled Ionic columns – a device integral to Nash’s overall New Street plan, and surviving only here (Ills 20.7, 20.8). The original agreement with Mayor lays some weight on the balustrades topping the parapets and colonnades, which were to be of stone, and on the iron fencing (of spear and tassel pattern) which both fronted the deep continuous basement areas and ran laterally to shield the entrance-bridges.¹⁸ As for the

houses themselves, they were not the monster 100ft mansions Nash had first dreamt of, just (the large corner houses apart) good first-raters with fronts typically of 32ft, backs several feet wider and ample stone staircases. The easternmost of Baxter's houses, Nos 1–3, had fronts of only 22–24ft, so that the eastern quadrant ended up with fifteen houses against the western's fourteen. Behind, Park Crescent Mews East enjoyed much less space than Park Crescent Mews West, an orderly triangular arrangement serving also Richardson's Upper Harley Street houses (Ill. 20.13a).

History and occupation, 1822–1945

The houses of the crescent did not completely fill up till the second half of the 1820s. But they sold for good prices (Henry Peto's No. 10 for £7,200 in 1826) and were fashionably occupied. Brazil's first full envoy to Britain, Manuel Rodriguez Gameiro Pessoa, Baron Itabayana, was an early resident.¹⁹ A directory of 1841 records two peeresses, a judge, a Portuguese man-about-town (the Baron de Lagos) and two MPs in its 29 houses, and just one resident marked as 'physician'. Medical immigration intensified in the eastern sector, where Joseph (Lord) Lister, the pioneer of antiseptic surgery, lived at No. 12 between 1877 and 1909. Soon after his death the LCC erected a bronze plaque there in 1915. It was thought destroyed after No. 12 was demolished, but had been rescued by an admirer and was restored to the replica house in 1966.

Another medical figure associated with Park Crescent is Sir Jonathan Hutchinson, surgeon, ophthalmologist and venereologist, 'one of the great medical teachers'. In 1893 Hutchinson (long resident in Cavendish Square) set up a Clinical Museum of paintings and specimens at the back of 1 Park Crescent, the house of his son Jonathan, who had followed in his specialisms. The idea derived from the museums set up on Hutchinson's initiative at annual meetings of the British Medical Association from the late 1860s, to

illustrate recent advances. With its lectures and demonstrations, aimed particularly at general practitioners, his museum enjoyed 'a great vogue for a time', before transfer to the Medical Graduates' College and Polyclinic in Chenies Street in 1898, which Hutchinson helped found; the collection was eventually acquired by the John Hopkins Medical School in Baltimore. Sir Harry Hamilton Johnston was probably recalling the museum in his 1920 prose sequel to Shaw's *Mrs Warren's Profession*, in making 1 Park Crescent, with its iron and glass 'studio' at the rear, the home of a professor of biology.²⁰

Other past residents of Park Crescent include: ²¹

Sir Edward Hall Alderson, judge. Died at his home, **No. 9**, 1857

George Frederick Bodley, architect. **No. 26**, 1886–91 ²²

Sir John Taylor Coleridge, judge; and his son John Duke Coleridge (1st Baron Coleridge), judge. **No. 26**, 1846–58 ²³

Samuel Whitfield Daukes, architect. **No. 3**, 1850s–60s

Sir William Erle, judge. **No. 4**, 1850s

Hugh Falconer, palaeontologist. Died at his home, **No. 21**, 1865

Sir Arthur Kekewich, judge. **No. 19**, 1870s–early 1900s

George Lyall, shipowner. Died at his home, **No. 17**, 1853

4th Lord Lyttelton, educationist. Died at his home, **No. 18**, 1876 (by hurling himself off the staircase)

Sir Carl Meyer, financier. Died at his home, **No. 12**, 1922

Emanuel Miller, psychiatrist, and his wife Betty Spiro, author (parents of the theatre director Jonathan Miller). **No. 23**, 1930s–40s

Marie Tempest, actress. **No. 24**, 1899–1902

Sir George Turner, judge. **No. 23**, 1840s–60s

Sir Charles Wheatstone, scientist, inventor of the concertina, stereoscope and 'Wheatstone bridge' circuit. **No. 19**, 1865–75

At the crescent's eastern tip, Nos 1 and 2 were taken down and rebuilt over girders as part of the works attending the building of the Metropolitan Railway in 1861–2. The railway company bought them back in 1889 to improve the ventilation of Great Portland Street Station by means of a large 'blow-hole' in their gardens, but the upshot was prolonged litigation with the lessees of Nos 3 and 4, who complained of increased noise and vibration and a 'filthy black' coating on their homes.²⁴ Piecemeal additions at the back and on top of various houses detracted from Park Crescent's unity. By the time of the Second World War it was dowdy and dirty, with many houses divided into flats or medical offices. In 1941 enemy action inflicted one of the severest losses on the Crown estate, destroying or irreparably damaging Nos 19–24 (Ill. 20.6).

Park Crescent since 1945

By the time war ended the showy but lightly built blocks all round Regent's Park were in a grievous state. Yet with Nash's reputation in the ascendant they could not simply be demolished. Hence the Gorell Report on the future of the Regent's Park terraces, commissioned by Government early in 1946 and published a year later. Influenced by evidence from the Ministry of Town and Country Planning, Lord Gorell's committee rated Park Crescent among the top seven terraces to be kept at all costs. It should 'be preserved so long as possible with the present façade, and the gaps left in it by bombing should be made good by new building to the former façade design'.²⁵ Thus was opened the road to replication, rare in post-war London.

Some short-term works took place, for instance at the south-western corner house, 83 Portland Place, let in 1947 to the Royal Air Forces Association; even so, this house was not to survive much longer. For repairs to the colonnade, Albert Richardson was consulted and lent his favourite

sculptor-carver P. G. Bentham to make accurate models of the distinctive Ionic capitals and quoins.²⁶ That was as far as things then went.

After post-war building controls were relaxed, the Crown Estate Commissioners decided in 1957 on a policy of radical rebuilding or rehabilitation for professional offices, as and when leases fell in. First available were the bombed sites at Nos 18–24, where prefabs had been erected, together with Nos 25–29 adjoining and 77–83 Portland Place. Here the developers Basil and Howard Samuel, with the architects Fitzroy Robinson & Partners, devised a big scheme with offices in the front and flats at the back facing Park Crescent Mews West. At Nos 7–12 in the eastern quadrant the father-and-son developers S. B. and Rex Harbour planned on similar lines, with Raglan Squire & Partners, architects. The first idea was to keep the old fronts and structures wherever possible. But preliminary stripping-down in 1959 showed the surviving structures to be so shaky that (despite public reassurances that they would be preserved) the decision was taken to rebuild the houses in their entirety with replica fronts.²⁷

That was formalized in policy in 1962, when Park Crescent became one of three Regent's Park compositions for which the LCC accepted facsimiles throughout. In 1964–5 a second project by the Samuels (through Ponsarn Investments, a subsidiary of Great Portland Estates), again with Fitzroy Robinson, covered 13–14 Park Crescent and 92–96 Portland Place. All these developments involved cramming in extra floors behind the taller storey-heights of the front blocks: some of the mews-facing buildings rose to seven storeys. At 77–81 and 92–96 Portland Place, not strictly part of the crescent, Fitzroy Robinson on behalf of Ponsarn had, with a preliminary nod from the London County Council's town planners, designed 'contemporary elevations ... to provide a complete break with the Nash buildings'. After the LCC's Historic Buildings Division pointed out that these houses too were listed, albeit not stucco-fronted, the Town Planning Committee changed its mind.

High-level correspondence had to follow before the developers submitted to replanning here too behind replica fronts.²⁸

Various professional and institutional tenants occupied the new buildings, while 26–29 Park Crescent was fitted up for opening in 1965 as the new Bloomsbury County Court, formerly at the top of Great Portland Street. A quirk of the planning was that to go from one half of the building to the other it was necessary to go through one of the main courtrooms. It was internally reconstructed in 1992 as the new Central London County Court, combining the functions of the former court and Westminster County Court in St Martin's Lane. At the same time, the judges and administrative staff took over 13–14 Park Crescent. In 1994 the court was refurbished as the Central London Civil Justice Centre, combining county court and civil trial centre functions. Difficulties caused by poor working conditions and the distance from the Royal Courts of Justice and Rolls Building led to the centre's closure, the county court reopening in 2014 in the Thomas More Building at the Royal Courts.²⁹

A high-profile scheme took place at 1–6 Park Crescent, after pressure came to bear on the Commissioners from the circle of the Queen Mother – recently appointed Chancellor of the University of London – to support a hostel-cum-club for overseas students. In 1960 there were said to be about 40,000 in Britain, half of them in London and ill-served by facilities. The prime mover of the scheme was Mary Trevelyan, overseas student adviser to the university, who had been influenced by similar Rockefeller-supported inter-war establishments in the United States. Hugh, Lord Euston, later 3rd Duke of Grafton, became its main spokesman as chairman of an influentially supported International Students Trust, and Patrick Wills of the Dulverton Trust its foremost financial backer.³⁰ It took shape as an office block, Argosy House, at 227 Great Portland Street, devised to help pay for the hostel to its north, with an assembly hall or theatre between the two. The entrance into the hostel was arranged from a courtyard backing on to Park Crescent at the top

of Great Portland Street. The dispositions were worked out by Euston's architects John E. M. MacGregor & Partner of Richmond, but at some point a bigger practice, T. P. Bennett & Partners, took over. Taylor Woodrow started the building in 1964 and International Students House was opened by the Queen Mother on 4 May 1965.³¹ The architecture is of a plain 1960s variety, brick-fronted towards Great Portland Street. The entrance court at the time of writing was cramped and scruffy, with ventilation plant connected with Great Portland Street Station eating a corner out of the site. The hostel's original function continues, but the assembly hall is now the Park Crescent Conference Centre. There is a mural of 1971, *A Summer Eclogue* by Roger de Grey, on the spacious main staircase.

Following the assassination of President Kennedy in November 1963 a left-over space between the courtyard and Marylebone Road became the setting for a memorial, as the result of a joint venture between the International Students Trust and the *Sunday Telegraph*, which had collected £50,000 from readers in £1 donations. Despite some initial hope that this might become the official British memorial (Runnymede was chosen) the Marylebone Road initiative remained a private one, with Philip Bennett for the architects, Lord Euston and the *Sunday Telegraph's* art critic Edwin Mullins taking the main decisions. The veteran Lithuanian-American sculptor Jacques Lipchitz was employed to make a bronze bust (there are other versions but it seems that the London memorial was the first). The shallow site, up against a major traffic artery, was far from ideal. The Royal Fine Art Commission opposed it altogether, and Bennett was persuaded by W. A. Eden of the LCC's Historic Buildings Division to create a semi-classical setting to harmonize with Park Crescent. At a late stage Bennett reverted to a backdrop of plain arches, in front of which the bust surmounts a granite plinth with a splayed base (Ill. 20.9). The memorial was unveiled by Robert and Edward Kennedy a week after the hostel was opened, on 15 May 1965.³² The little enclave now wears an air of neglect.

‘Few people want to sleep in a room overlooking Park Crescent – it is not a quiet place by day or by night’. So confessed the Crown Estate Commissioners as far back as 1962.³³ Fifty years later the noise and dirt of Marylebone Road remain inexorable and unabated by the thick planting of the crescent garden. That and the cool anonymity of the stucco replica fronts make Park Crescent sadly soulless today.

In 2013 the entire western quadrant was bought by PCW Property Holdings, who at the time of writing (2016) are planning to redevelop the site, including 77–81 Portland Place and Park Crescent Mews West, with flats and houses. The intention is to build something much closer in feel to the original sweep of houses, with period-style front doors, fanlights and lanterns, area bridges and steps, chimney stacks and slated roofs; while the stuccowork of the façade is to be seamless, without the tell-tale expansion joints of the postwar buildings; rooms comparable in scale to those of the original houses are planned. The architects for the scheme are Paul Davis & Partners.³⁴

Park Crescent Gardens

An early drawing of a proposed layout and planting for ‘the two Crescents [sic] at the end of Portland Place’ has survived (Ill. 20.10).³⁵ Its title betrays that the whole circus was still in prospect when it was made. Only the half north of the New Road is depicted, but the layout was presumably meant to apply to both sides. A regular, symmetrical path system is shown, with a central fountain and seven small sub-crescents round the circumference, each laid out for bedding and with enclosed seats at the back whence visitors could contemplate the whole garden. Next to the main road at the ends were the two lodges with little yards behind, much as built. Otherwise the plan bears scant resemblance to the final planting of Park Crescent Gardens.

That was probably taking shape in 1821, when the Woods and Forests were negotiating with residents in Portland Place and Park Crescent, asking them to take charge of the gardens. Already Park Crescent and what became Park Square were being considered as one, for the residents' committee requested as a quid pro quo that a tunnel be built to connect the two gardens, on the grounds that crossing the New Road posed 'considerable danger at most times to children, and ... inconvenience to ladies'.³⁶ Hence the origin of the so-called 'nursemaids' tunnel', built just east of the centre line. It is a surprisingly ample passage, arched and with attached columns at the entrances.

The early layout of the garden itself is well shown on Mayhew's 1834-5 map of the Crown improvements, which indicates an inflected circumferential path with a few internal winding routes. Trees or shrubs are dense between the main path and the edges but lighter in the centre. This arrangement has been largely adhered to, though the increased height and thickness of planting now block any sense of connection between Portland Place and Regent's Park.

Another early but undated document is a specification for the railings, paving and 'pavilions' or lodges for Regent's Circus.³⁷ It may not have been exactly followed. The railings along the New Road were to be plainer than those round the crescents. The four lodges were to be brick-built, covered with Parker's cement coloured and jointed to resemble Bath stone, and roofed in 'Lord Stanhope's composition'. Their subsequent history is involved. The two diminutive lodges within Park Crescent Gardens, originally identical in design to their northern counterparts within Park Square, were single-room structures with Doric porches. Coming within the remit of the Crown Estate Paving Commissioners, they were altered and extended over the years. The eastern one was taken down when the Metropolitan Railway was laid out and rebuilt with an improved layout in 1863. The architect involved was W. Eden Nesfield, then also building his well-known vernacular revival lodge in

Regent's Park, but it appears that in elevation at least the Park Crescent lodge more or less copied what had been there before (Ill. 20.11).³⁸ Both lodges were again reconstructed in facsimile when Marylebone Road was widened in the 1960s. In 1967 two octagonal stuccoed structures appeared on the north side of the garden, concealing vents for Regent's Park Underground Station. These works were undertaken by the Greater London Council's Historic Buildings Division (job architect, Timothy Bidwell). The railings round the gardens are mostly original ironwork, reset on modern plinths. 'Peachey Regent Street' on some of the standards suggests a date around 1825, when John Peachey moved his ironmonger's shop to Regent Street.³⁹

The gardens include an important embellishment at their southern extremity, facing down Portland Place, in the shape of a life-sized bronze statue of the Duke of Kent, Queen Victoria's father, by Sebastian Gahagan. After the Duke's death in 1820 a subscription was opened for a commemorative statue, well supported by fellow-freemasons. Gahagan acquired the job following a limited competition, and the committee in question was already hoping for the site looking down Portland Place in 1821. That was not granted by George IV until 1823, when Joseph Hume, the Radical MP, forwarded to the Woods and Forests the advice of John Soane (another freemason) that the monument needed a clear semi-circle of 40ft diameter to show it off to advantage. So big an incursion was not granted, leaving the statue as erected in February 1824 cramped just inside the railings.⁴⁰ Standing on a high pedestal of Haytor granite, Gahagan's bronze, cast by the firm of John Braithwaite, incurred a mixed reception. James Elmes thought it 'in a manly energetic style; but coarse in execution, and vulgar in conception'. He was pleased however with the use of modern costume: 'The ducal robe supplies the place of the imperial paludamentum, with appropriateness, and he has arranged it with skill'.⁴¹ The years before the First World War saw a proposal, fronted architecturally by Aston Webb, to move this statue and introduce a new pedestrian axis leading to a national Shakespeare Memorial

in Park Square Gardens. Nothing came of it, nor of subsequent ideas to introduce similar axes connecting Portland Place and the park.⁴²

A little east of the statue on the pavement stands a fine example of the granite troughs erected by the Metropolitan Drinking Fountain and Cattle Trough Association. Incorporating a lower trough for dogs below the larger and longer one for horses, it was originally erected near Great Portland Street Station in 1878. It was given by Mrs Erle in memory of her husband Peter Erle, QC, of 12 Park Crescent, who died the previous year; his initials are inscribed on one end.⁴³

Regent's Park Station

This station, opened on the Baker Street and Waterloo Railway (now Bakerloo Line) between Park Crescent Gardens and Marylebone Road in 1906, has never enjoyed any above-ground structures of substance. Access to the booking hall from ground level is by way of parallel stairways on the south side of the road, and hence by twin tunnels and ramps under the gardens. Iron railings punctuated by overthrows at the ends and the centre carrying the station and line names and hanging lights were the only original elements visible at street level. Most of these were simplified or removed when Marylebone Road was widened in the 1960s, further squeezing the surroundings to the station, with a bare wall shielding the stairs from the road. A pedestrian subway across the road has long been a desideratum, but the presence of the Metropolitan Line tracks under the roadway immediately to the north has made it impossible.

Ice well, Park Crescent Mews West

In 1780 Samuel Dash of 17 Upper Harley Street (now 122 Harley Street) sought permission from the Woods and Forests to construct an underground 'arch' in Dupper Field. His was then the northernmost house on the east side of the street, on the Portland estate, and Dupper Field ran along his northern boundary. Dash's arch is presumed to be the large brick-built ice-well uncovered by ground work at Park Crescent Mews West in 1961 but almost immediately thereafter filled with rubble and built over. Partially excavated in 2014, it became a Scheduled Ancient Monument in 2015 and is due (2016) to be cleared and restored as part of the proposed redevelopment of the west half of Park Crescent by PCW Property Holdings.⁴⁴

From its size (30ft in diameter and 42ft deep), it must have been constructed for large-scale commercial use, though nothing has come to light connecting Dash with ice dealing or one of the trades using ice – such as confectionery, pastry-making and fish-selling. Dash, with a country home in Shepherd's Hill, Sussex and a partnership in a distillery, was related to the Wilkite politician John Sawbridge and his sister the historian Catharine Macaulay.

The first explicit references to an ice well here are in the *Morning Post* in March–April 1826, when the Fleet Street pastry cook, confectioner and caterer William Leftwich advertised ice for sale from his well in Park Crescent Mews, six inches thick and 'of superior quality for cleanliness than that usually sold'.⁴⁵ Leftwich had pioneered the large-scale import of ice in 1822, when after a particularly mild winter he shipped 300 tons of it to London from the Norwegian coast. Although he continued to import from Norway and Greenland in later years, in 1825 he advertised to buy ice from anywhere within 40 miles of London, or further if water transport was available, though giving no indication of the location of his wells at that time.⁴⁶ The mews well was soon superseded. In 1828 he offered 'the best and clearest ice in London'

from the mews, stating that it had been collected from the canal in Regent's Park in early 1827. But he had already built 'an immense ice well' at Regent's Park, and in 1829 announced that he had left the mews for this bigger well. He may however have retained the old well for some time, as he continued to take orders from the 'Harley-street Lodge'. But it was not among his properties listed in his 1841 will, which included two wells, one in what is now Jamestown Road, Camden Town, the other at Cumberland Market. Although rediscovered in 1961, the well had hardly disappeared from view, for it was let on a 7-year lease as recently as 1952, when this part of the mews had long been occupied by commercial garages. Still described as an ice well, it was noted as being under the roadway.⁴⁷