

## Chapter 3

### 134–162 Oxford Street

#### Wells Street to Winsley Street

Wells Street marks the eastern boundary of the former Cavendish–Harley, later Portland and later again Howard de Walden estate. So the block fronting Oxford Street between Winsley Street and Wells Street, now numbered 134–162 (but until 1880 Nos 64–78), formed the south-easternmost corner of this great landholding. Building began around 1721. For a century and more thereafter the Oxford Street frontage was broken up by several alleys or lanes leading back to courts or yards, from which only Adam and Eve Court survives.

Among the fashionable shops which set Oxford Street's tone from the 1770s onwards, drapers and ironmongers were to the fore hereabouts, also silversmiths and jewellers, commonly doubling as pawnbrokers. The garment trade was represented from the 1860s by the outfitters Hyam & Co. at the Wells Street end of the block (Nos 134–140) and silversmithing by Mappin & Webb at the Winsley Street end (Nos 156–162); Mappin & Webb's surviving premises, dating mainly from 1907–8, are among Oxford Street's finest architecture. But the major influence on development was the insertion in 1827–8 of the Royal (later Queen's) Bazaar behind the centre of the block. Neither the bazaar nor the Princess's Theatre which soon succeeded it in 1840 was large or prominent, but their outliers and approaches eventually permeated the whole back of the block. Their site is now represented by Princess House of 1931–3, with a commercial Oxford Street front numbered 150–152.

*Early Development*

The earliest phase of building here during the 1720s was concentrated on the former garden in front of the Adam and Eve pub, which was set well back from the main road approximately where Eastcastle Street now runs and bordered on the east by Wells Lane (now Street). Early takers of building plots from the Cavendish-Harley trustees along the frontage included John De St Amour, gentleman; William Wells, of the family from whom Wells Street takes its name; William Bouch, mason; Henry Burdyn, plumber; and Edward White, paviour.<sup>1</sup> The backlands of this area grew up in a piecemeal way. Adam and Eve Court represents a passage that may have been there since the seventeenth century, leading to the pub of that name.

The exotically named St Amour, domiciled in St James's parish, took an early lease in 1720 of a sizeable plot fronting east on 'a new intended street', presumably Wells Street, though there had been a lane here for some decades previously. He was supposed to build a substantial house here but probably never did so, mortgaging his plot and dying before the mortgage had been repaid. His interests were transferred to his son James De St Amour, who was running a riding house on the site from 1725. The younger St Amour is named as riding master to a troop of horse grenadiers in 1729 and later as a quartermaster to a regiment of dragoons. He in his turn was dead by 1734.<sup>2</sup>

It was on one of William Bouch's plots that James Figg the boxer built his 'new amphitheatre', located in his vivid advertisements of 1724 onwards as 'joyning to his house at the sign of the City of Oxford in Oxford Road, Marylebone Fields'. Figg had previously fought and taught at the Boarded House deeper north in the fields, but plainly took advantage of the new building developments to re-establish himself in some style. Nothing is known of the appearance of his amphitheatre, sometimes also known as his 'great room'. Bouch claimed Figg had erected it without permission, took him to court over the issue, but lost. In 1732 Figg passed it on to another boxer,

Thomas Sibblis, who advertised contests in similar terms. In one such notice the room is said to be 'in the Adam and Eve Passage', while in others it is remarked that 'there is the same Conveniency for the Reception of Gentlemen as was formerly at Mr Figg's, and to go through the House without being incommoded by the Mob'. The implication is that the better class of spectator had access to the room via the house or pub in front, whereas ordinary fans had to enter through the passage. After Figg's death in 1734 no more is heard of the venue. That it was built at all shows that the new developments on the Cavendish-Harley estate did not directly eradicate the rougher side of Marylebone life.<sup>3</sup>

West of the Adam and Eve garden lay a piece of land held on a lengthy lease dating from 1695 by William Long, who ran a brewery on the back part of the property. Long issued a building sublease for part of the Oxford Street frontage in 1722 to Henry Riley, carpenter, and Richard Thornton, bricklayer. But development on the rest of this land was delayed by at least a decade. Winsley Street was probably not cut through till the mid 1730s, when Long made a new arrangement with the Cavendish-Harleys and began issuing fresh building leases to Francis Tredgold, carpenter, and to Riley, including some abutting the main road (1740-1).<sup>4</sup>

Rocque's map shows stable yards behind this part of the frontage. The larger one had two arms and a central block of building named as Life Guard Yard. By the 1780s the latter had become known as White Lion Yard, no doubt in reference to an inn or pub of that name; its inhabitants included a carpenter and an auctioneer.<sup>5</sup> Horwood depicts a narrow passage running north-south, a sizeable open space in the centre marked as White Lion Yard and further blocks to the south and west, reached from the east side of Winsley Street. The main occupants here at the start of the nineteenth century were coachmakers: the establishments of Hucklebridge & Panther facing Winsley Street, and Leader & Son in the larger White Lion Yard. A gateway

between the then 71 and 72 Oxford Street led to a cowkeeper's establishment, and another between 73 and 74 to White Lion Yard.<sup>6</sup>

### *Smaller shops*

Going westwards from Wells Street, the corner house (originally No. 64, later 134) was a linen draper's shop from the 1780s until it was taken over by Hyams. Duff & Hodgson, music sellers and piano makers at No. 65, was a short-lived firm dating from the 1830s; Hodgson had a connection with the Princess's Theatre, which put on an 'opera' of his in 1842.<sup>7</sup> Nos 66 & 67 next to Adam and Eve Court was an ironmonger's establishment, extended from one shop into two by John Roberts, here by 1788. Roberts & his partner advertised an improved kitchen range obtainable from No. 66 in 1801. They were succeeded from about 1816 to 1842 by May & Morrith, sometime suppliers of ironwork to John Nash and of iron sundries including hot-water pipes and gardening equipment.<sup>8</sup>

Next west of Adam and Eve Court No. 68, later 142, was a pawnbroker's and silversmith's for over a century and a half. The business can be traced back to at least 1802 under the name of George Dobree; in publicity a foundation date of 1796 was claimed.<sup>9</sup> From 1840 it was run by Richard Attenborough (1809-86), one of a clan of Northamptonshire origin who at the end of the century claimed 'the name of Attenborough had always been identified with the leading pawnbroking business in London'. A younger Richard Attenborough, probably a nephew, had a pawnbroker's shop in Piccadilly, diversified into owning iron mines and was heavily bankrupted in 1885. Next year the older Attenborough, though still in a good way of business in Oxford Street, shot himself at his Holland Park house. His lease and stock were then sold to James Jay, who traded as Jay, Richard Attenborough, to the remaining Attenboroughs' annoyance. The business continued under that name at Nos 142-144 up to the 1960s. The separate firm

of George Attenborough & Son which continues to this day in Fleet Street was evidently related.<sup>10</sup>

In the early 1800s No. 69 (old numbering) next west of Dobree's was a cutler's, remaining so for at least forty years, and No. 71 a silversmith's. At the same date No. 72 was a linen draper and No. 73 a lace warehouse (John & William Hayward, soon to move further west to No. 81). The latter lay beside the entry to White Lion Yard, the site from 1827 of the Royal Bazaar. No. 74 west of the entry was then a pub, the King's Head; it was followed in sequence at Nos 75–78 by a mercer, a medicine warehouse, a haberdasher and a draper, these two last on the later site of Mappin & Webb next to Winsley Street.<sup>11</sup> The enduring firm here was that of James Ince & Son, furriers, at No. 75, later 156. When first setting up here in 1812 James Ince called himself a silk mercer, in due course adding the words 'shawl warehouse'. By 1851, when he and his son exhibited furs at the Great Exhibition, his appellation was simply furrier. The Ince name if not dynasty retained the address till the 1920s.<sup>12</sup>

A reconstruction of the centre of this block took place under the Portland Estate's aegis between the 1870s and 1890s, a section of which survives as the present Nos 142–148. The Inces were early to take up the cudgels, rebuilding their No. 156 to designs by Tolley & Dale in 1872 (Scrivener & White, builders).<sup>13</sup> Subsequent rebuildings were mostly entrusted to Augustus E. Hughes, a regular employee of the Portland Estate at this date. He began in 1881 with the former Nos 71 and 72, then newly Nos 148A and 150, next to the Princess's Theatre; as a result of rebuilding the theatre the premises of the jewellers Cook & Burchett at No. 72, had collapsed, ruining their stock, and its reconstruction entailed rebuilding No. 71 also.<sup>14</sup> This pair has since been demolished, but the surviving buildings next east, now numbered 146–148, are of similar style and date. Nos 142–144 have plainer fenestration but a slightly projecting central bay. These were for Jay, Richard Attenborough. No. 144 was built first, No. 142 following on next to Adam and Eve Court in 1892.<sup>15</sup> Sturdy plain commercial buildings of brick

with stone or stucco dressings, they have been much altered, and as often, the crowning dormers in the roof have been simplified.

*Nos 134–140: Hyam & Co., later C & A Modes*

The tailors and outfitters Hyam & Co. Ltd occupied eye-catching premises next to Oxford Street's western corner with Wells Street from about 1862 to 1925. But their presence in the street went back to 1849, when Lawrence Hyam & Company opened their 'Pantechnetheca' at 86 Oxford Street, a small shop in the next block west beyond Winsley Street. The Hyams were a dynamic Jewish family of tailors and outfitters with trading roots in eighteenth-century Ipswich.<sup>16</sup> Lawrence Hyam started out with a shop in Bury St Edmunds, then moved to the City at 36 Gracechurch Street in 1845, before opening his West End branch. There were already other Hyam shops in Bristol and Liverpool, sometimes using the name Pantechnetheca, and by the time of the Great Exhibition twelve altogether – two each in London, Bristol and Manchester, and one each in Birmingham, Dublin, Glasgow, Hull, Leeds and Liverpool. They were therefore an early 'multiple' of provincial origin, self-described as merchant tailors, outfitters, woollen drapers and manufacturers of ready-to-wear clothing.<sup>17</sup> They advertised persistently and verbosely, for the most part in the provincial press. The Hyams all changed their family name to Halford in 1875, but the name of the business remained unaltered.

In 1862 the company moved eastwards to double premises at Nos 66 and 67 just east of Adam and Eve Court, previously occupied by May & Morrill, ironmongers. These were expensively rebuilt in stone to designs by the up-and-coming Horace Jones, not yet then architect to the City Corporation or to Marshall & Snelgrove further west along Oxford Street; the builder was Pritchard. The result was a lively exercise in commercial Palladianism, with strongly coursed masonry and a central Venetian window

to the first floor. Pilasters featured abundantly, along with a standing figure on the cornice and a bulbous crowning mansard. The shop front was all-glass, framed between reeded iron columns.<sup>18</sup>

The style thus set carried over into Hyam & Co.'s several expansions. The original premises having become Nos 138–140, the shop next east, No. 136, was rebuilt in 1886 to designs by Davis & Emanuel, architects, with E. Lawrance & Son as builders. Then in 1890–1 the same combination took in the corner at No. 134 with the return to Wells Street, maintaining a similar elevation but not the spiky mansard.<sup>19</sup> In a final reconstruction, Arthur Sykes in 1910 added a full extra storey in the roof, eliminating the mansard, plus five extra bays up Wells Street.<sup>20</sup> The clumsy result gave Hyam & Co. department-store scale and took them halfway up the block to Eastcastle Street.

In 1925 the Hyams were displaced by C & A Modes, a branch of the successful but publicity-shy Dutch-German drapers company founded by the Brenninkmeijer family. This was the second C & A branch to open, succeeding the pioneering British shop of 1922 further west at 376–384 Oxford Street. The Hyams branch was briefly called Canda but soon reverted to the initials.<sup>21</sup> Eventually in the 1960s it transferred westwards to the former Peter Robinson building at Nos 200–212. Nos 134–140 were then replaced by Wells House, an ugly building erected in 1965–7 by Tersons to designs by Ronald Ward & Partners for Town and City Properties, with four shop units facing Oxford Street and offices and showrooms entered from Wells Street. It was reclad in 1993–4 in a weak neoclassical idiom (architects, Holford Associates).<sup>22</sup>

*Nos 156–162: former Mappin & Webb building*

This building, mostly erected for the silversmiths Mappin & Webb in 1907–8 to the nominal designs of John Belcher but always attributed to his assistant

and partner J. J. Joass, may be claimed as Oxford Street's most distinguished piece of architecture. It was originally called Sheffield House, later Mappin House.

Mappin & Webb derived from a successful manufacturing business started by the Sheffield cutler Joseph Mappin in 1825 and much expanded as Mappin Brothers by his four sons. In 1845 that company opened its first London shop in the City, benefitting like other Birmingham and Sheffield firms from the introduction of electroplated cutlery to widen the availability of smart tableware.<sup>23</sup> The youngest of the four brothers, John Newton Mappin (1835–1913) – not to be confused with his uncle of the same name, a brewer who left money for the founding of the Mappin Art Gallery, Sheffield – joined Mappin Brothers in 1857. But following disputes between the partners he elected in 1859 to start his own firm, originally Mappin & Company, with separate works in Sheffield and a shop at 77 and 78 Oxford Street (old numbering), next to the corner with Winsley Street. Early advertisements for this establishment offered to supply cutlery, electro-silverplate, dressing bags and cases, razors, penknives and scissors at Sheffield prices. Mappin Brothers took the new firm to court in 1860 for using the family name, but lost. Soon however the junior company adopted the name Mappin & Webb, J. N. Mappin having always acted in partnership with George Webb of Clapham, whose sister he married just after the lawsuit. For years the rival firms co-existed, both running works in Sheffield, trading from City and West End branches plus a few provincial shops and exhibiting separately, until Mappin & Webb absorbed Mappin Brothers in 1903.<sup>24</sup>

Mappin & Webb made extensive alterations to its Oxford Street premises in 1867, the year of a Paris exhibition at which its displays were commended.<sup>25</sup> This may have been when the so-called Winsley Works were added. In due course it also grew eastwards by one shop, taking over the former No. 76 (after 1880 No. 158), so giving the firm the whole of Nos 158–162; this address was rebuilt to designs by Augustus E. Hughes in 1889–90.<sup>26</sup>



Meanwhile in 1870 Mappin & Webb opened conspicuous City premises at the apex of Poultry and Queen Victoria Street. That building, designed in a bold Victorian Gothic by the architects J. & J. Belcher, was to be the most prominent casualty of the so-called Mansion House Square redevelopment, later 'Number One Poultry', championed by Lord Palumbo towards the end of the twentieth century.

A link with the younger Belcher must have been maintained, for it was to him that J. N. Mappin turned when a total rebuilding of the Oxford Street shop at Nos 158–162 was contemplated. That followed the two Mappin firms' amalgamation and Mappin & Webb Ltd's inauguration as a public company with strengthened finances in 1903. Minor works took place to the Oxford Street premises around then,<sup>27</sup> but the first evidence of Belcher's involvement comes in 1906, when a perspective of the building much as built was shown at the Royal Academy, drawn by J. J. Joass, his chief assistant.<sup>28</sup>

Joass had been recently taken into full partnership; his Scottish training in classical masonry added force and rigour to the Belcher practice, along with a Michelangesque twist to the mixed menu of so-called Edwardian Baroque. Here and in his contemporary Royal Insurance Building on a similar corner site in Piccadilly, Joass sought to endow the space-saving frame with glamour and energy coupled with a structural logic absent from the exuberant Waring & Gillow block, brand new and immediately next west. Uniting movement with astringency, his architecture sets up (in Brian Hanson's words) a 'delicious tension between the transparency of glass and the apparent weight of stone'.<sup>29</sup> The elevation is deliberately top-heavy, divided between a hefty attic and mansard level surmounting three main storeys gathered under arches and then to all appearances propped on single elongated monolithic columns, isolated against the glass expanses of ground and mezzanine floors. Each storey is differentiated in detail, combining tripartite fenestration of American derivation with the language of the Laurentian Library. The whole is clad in Pentelic marble, allegedly the first

occasion this famous material had been specified for the complete exterior of a British building. The bronze shop fronts were made by Frederick Sage & Co., and the first-floor balconies, since removed, by J. W. Singer & Son of Frome.<sup>30</sup>

In plan the building was straightforward and open, with central access to the shop from Oxford Street and an entrance to the upper floors from a side door in Winsley Street marked Sheffield House. The structural frame combined steelwork for the stanchions contributed by Edward Wood & Co. with floors and roof constructed according to the Kleine patent floor system, which combined tension rods and brickwork. The premises, erected by Belcher's favourite builders, Godson & Sons of Kilburn, took a full twelve months to build, starting with the new basement before the old premises were destroyed, so that trading could continue. Mappin & Webb occupied only the ground and mezzanine for their own purposes, the latter being taken up by a board room and counting house; the upper floors were let. The main shop interior was divided into open compartments featuring showcases sparsely deployed so that wares could be seen from all sides. It was partly lit from a central circular light well, and lined with Carrara and Sienna marble supplied by Farmer & Brindley. The electroliers were made by Oslers of Oxford Street to the Belcher firm's designs. Heraldic stained glass was contributed by A. J. Dix.<sup>31</sup>

In 1912 Belcher & Joass (as the Belcher firm was by then formally called) extended the building to include 2 Winsley Street at the back, as had already been contemplated. It was further enlarged in 1929, when Joass returned to add in No. 156 on the east flank in an identical style – the addition is almost imperceptible. Finally in 1936 Yates, Cook & Darbyshire took in 4 Winsley Street, adopting a plain stone elevation.<sup>32</sup> By then the whole building was known as Mappin House. A thorough refurbishment of the premises took place in 1952–3.<sup>33</sup> But the nearby Regent Street branch (inherited from Mappin Brothers and rebuilt to quieter designs by Joass in 1914–15)<sup>34</sup> was by

then proving more successful. A fresh board imposed more entrepreneurial policies, using Mappin & Webb's assets to buy other concerns and go into property speculation. So the headquarters shop was let in 1956 to Swears & Wells, the furriers, on the grounds that 'the character of this particular part of Oxford Street having changed so much since the War, it had become manifestly unsuitable for our class of business'.<sup>35</sup> Thereafter Mappin & Webb's London outlets were their Regent Street, Queen Victoria Street and Brompton Road branches. But the board continued to meet at Mappin House until the firm was sold to Charles Clore's Sears Holdings in 1959.<sup>36</sup> Mappin & Webb continues today in various locations as an up-market dealer in watches and luxury goods, but is no longer represented in Oxford Street.

#### *The Royal (later Queen's) Bazaar*

Covered bazaars and arcades on the Paris model became a shopping craze in the years after Waterloo, and the backlands behind Oxford Street soon attracted examples of the genre. The first was John Trotter's Soho Bazaar off the north-west corner of Soho Square, opened in 1816.<sup>37</sup> In 1827 Thomas Hamlet followed suit, having bought the lease of sprawling premises behind this part of Oxford Street at auction for £6,930.<sup>38</sup> That followed the bankruptcy of William Leader, coachmaker, whose address was usually given as Wells Street. Leader's holdings included a manufactory in White Lion Yard, a showroom facing Oxford Street (old No. 73) and other properties in Castle Street behind and Adam and Eve Court. The auction notice included the suggestion that they might be suitable 'for a bazaar of the first consequence'.<sup>39</sup>

Hamlet, said to have been a natural son of Sir Francis Dashwood, was an entrepreneurial silversmith who operated from a shop near Leicester Square and won a fortune lending money to persons of influence, including the Duke of York. With a house in Cavendish Square and an estate at Denham, Bucks, he was at the peak of his activity during George IV's reign,

having other speculations on foot at Millbank and in the development of Bognor.<sup>40</sup>

Hamlet thought of the Royal Bazaar, as he was permitted to call his creation, as a mixture of a shopping and entertainment centre.<sup>41</sup> He announced it in December 1827 as composed of three elements: the bazaar ‘for the sale of works of art and manufactures’, the British Diorama, and an ‘Exhibition of Works of Art’. The bazaar itself, inaugurated early in the new year, was free and occupied by individual stallholders ranged behind counters; the diorama and exhibition cost a shilling each and opened a little later. Hamlet was keen to claim that any profits he made from these shows would go to charity.<sup>42</sup> The bazaar occupied a two-storey galleried space and the exhibition a separate room at the back, the diorama surmounting it at the top of the stairs. The diorama concept was copied from the original diorama opened in 1823 at Park Square East by Daguerre with help from A. C. Pugin, but Hamlet’s amphitheatre did not itself rotate, as did Daguerre’s. Instead the four monumental and romantic paintings displayed, commissioned by Hamlet from Clarkson Stanfield and David Roberts and each measuring about 30ft by 40ft, were moved by rollers. It is not clear who designed and built the original complex; Hamlet had some claim to design skills, so may have done so himself. The entrance, to the left of 73 Oxford Street, was later depicted on Tallis’s street guide as marked by statues or caryatids at first-floor level flanking double doors.

Hamlet’s formula proving popular, he quickly added ‘a suite of rooms for the exhibition of Household Furniture, for sale ... The counters of the Bazaar are abundantly stocked with *bijouterie* and nic-nacs’, reported *The Mirror of Literature, Amusement and Instruction*,

the Nouveautés de Paris and Spitalfields – Canton in China, and Leather-lane in Holborn – toy-carts for children, and fleecy hosiery for old folks – puffs and pastry and the last new song – inkstands, taper-lights, pen-wipes, perfumed

sealing-wax, French hair-paper, curling-wheels – and all the fair ammunition of love and madness.<sup>43</sup>

As for the diorama, a link was forged with the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, where Stanfield and his associates painted scene sets which illustrated the Royal Bazaar itself. Hamlet then commissioned four new diorama paintings from Roberts and Stanfield.

Not long after these went on display, the diorama caught fire in May 1829 and most of the bazaar burnt down. There was no loss of life but the paintings and much traders' stock were destroyed. As the recently added rooms escaped the conflagration, the bazaar was partly up and running again by July. The premises had been well insured. So the rebuilt bazaar, reopened in March 1830, could be described as enlarged and improved, with a physiorama ('a 200ft long gallery accommodating fourteen hastily painted cosmoramic views')<sup>44</sup> to add to the diorama. This may have been linked to a concert room at the back towards Castle Street East, which by January 1831 boasted the amenity of a carriage drive.<sup>45</sup>

After George IV's death, Hamlet secured fresh royal patronage and changed the name to the Queen's Bazaar. The Duchess of Kent and Princess Victoria were also among early visitors.<sup>46</sup> But in the new economizing reign his fortunes declined, as large debts owed to him turned sour. For a time he shared the management with the minor painter R. R. Reinagle, who presumably helped with the changing and often topical programmes of diorama paintings, musical events and exhibitions of art works including such curiosities as the flint glass Royal Clarence Vase, 14ft high and 10ft wide, or John Greenshields' colossal statues of George IV and the Duke of York, both shown in 1831.<sup>47</sup> But by 1834 the partners were in trouble. Hamlet lost his house and paintings, and tried to sell the Queen's Bazaar, whose profits he inflated as over £5,000 per annum.<sup>48</sup> Yet no sale took place. Reinagle failed completely, but for the moment Hamlet staved off bankruptcy, his jewellery business administered by trustees. The bazaar and its sideshows staggered

on, their trade damaged (as Hamlet argued) by the conversion that same year of the much larger Pantheon opposite into a bazaar of its own.

### *The Princess's Theatre*

Rumours that the bazaar was to be converted into a theatre started as early as 1834.<sup>49</sup> Hamlet confirmed that when he obtained a music licence in 1836. He now made an agreement with James Prescott Warde, an unreliable actor-manager who had bungled the finances of the Covent Garden Theatre and sought another venue. Warde's nephew, the inexperienced C. S. Duncan, was chosen as architect and a contract signed with the builder William Barron in February 1837. But the £6,000 needed to complete the building failed to materialize from Warde's backers, so Hamlet stopped the work that autumn. When he applied for a renewal of his licence, the magistrates were divided. Always plausible, Hamlet claimed that the project was under the new Queen's patronage, was being fitted up expressly for her reception and could be made ready 'within seven hours'. Sir Peter Laurie and others, agreeing that Hamlet was 'a respectable man', felt the theatre would be 'a great accommodation to the inhabitants of Marylebone'. Nevertheless his application narrowly failed.<sup>50</sup> In due course Hamlet won his licence back, persuading the magistrates that the 'splendid' concert room was on the verge of completion. Even so, the ensemble was far from truly finished when it at last opened for business on 30 September 1840, to critical notice from the *Morning Post*.<sup>51</sup>

In order to finish it the Princess's Theatre, so called by permission of Queen Victoria before her accession, had been taken over in some stage of advancement from Duncan by T. Marsh Nelson, an architect in his twenties near the start of a moderately successful career. The builders were Haward & Nixon of Leicester Square and decorations were by the well-known Crace firm. As with the bazaar there were three elements: a concert room at the back

reached from Castle Street East, 84ft by 45ft and 35ft in height with a gallery at the back; a saloon or refreshment room, 60ft by 46ft and 25ft high, probably jutting out westwards towards Winsley Street; and the theatre itself, occupying the position of the bazaar on the White Lion Yard site. The concert room and saloon were both top-lit and painted 'in the Pompeiian style', with medallion portraits of composers on the walls of the former. The auditorium, seating about 1,500, faced towards Wells Street; it was high in proportion to its depth, with three tiers of boxes and a top tier of lunettes, between which terms or half-caryatids in relief filled up the space and appeared to support the ceiling, where putti were painted in circular panels. The decorative treatment of each tier of boxes differed, and there were liberal helpings of crimson drapery, including valances over each box. The entrance from Oxford Street was little changed, apart from some gilding bestowed on the caryatids.<sup>52</sup> But by 1850 it had been clumsily recast along with the shop front of 73 Oxford Street to feature a tradesman's warrant between pilasters, and above that a pair of seated allegorical figures flanking a clock or a barrel – versions differ.

The theatre did not get off the ground till after 1841, when Hamlet failed at last. His many creditors included Nelson, the Craces and Haward for unpaid work on the building, and the Duke of Portland for rent. It was finally sold to a Mr Montague for £14,500, well under half its cost.<sup>53</sup> J. M. Maddox took on the lease next year, instituting a medley of concerts, vaudeville and opera. Then when Charles Kean took on a sublease of the theatre alone in 1850, the Princess's entered into nine years of glory. Kean and his wife invested their personal fortune in a series of high-class, lavish productions, notably their historically dressed Shakespeare revivals which were to be remembered for generations. 'My Theatre is small – my ideas are large', Kean told Prince Albert's secretary: 'I cannot act in a commercial spirit'.<sup>54</sup> Among his alterations to the premises was a redecoration in white and gold of the auditorium in 1856, carried out by Charles Kuckuck, 'decorator to the King of

Hanover'. This featured paintings along the box fronts showing scenes from the Shakespeare productions, and a new allegorical ceiling. *The Builder* was critical of these or some later paintings by Kuckuck.<sup>55</sup>

Kean left in 1859, claiming to have spent vastly on the theatre.<sup>56</sup> Subsequent managers soon rid it of its Shakespearean trappings and reverted to melodrama. The novelist and playwright Charles Reade enjoyed some successes there in the 1870s with his own *Never Too Late to Mend* and *Drink*, an adaptation of Zola's *L'Assommoir*. Reade opined that the Princess's was 'in a great thoroughfare. Wet always draws customers into it. It holds a lot of money, and has paid with big pieces'.<sup>57</sup>

Yet the theatre was never very profitable. To improve its facilities and fortunes major works took place in 1880, carried out by the architect C. J. Phipps and builder Mark Manley for Walter Gooch. Phipps recast the auditorium, abolished the concert hall at the back in favour of dressing rooms and other service rooms, and improved the approaches from all three sides. The Oxford Street front was worthily rebuilt as a simple one-bay monumental stone arch in ornamental French Renaissance style, the upper portion expressed as a window with decorative stained glass set back behind a balcony, thus creating a loggia overlooking the street.<sup>58</sup>

The careless rebuilding of this front caused the collapse of the neighbouring premises of Cook & Burchett, jewellers and silversmiths, at No. 72 (later 150). As the disaster ruined much of their stock they successfully sued for damages, and this became a factor in Gooch's bankruptcy in 1882. Nor was that the last the theatre's managers heard from these neighbours. When in 1890 an iron and glass shelter was erected down to the street without consent, Cook & Burchett called for it to come down: 'such things spoil the character of the street - the architecture of which in some parts is really very fine - thus deteriorating property and lessening its rateable value'. Despite further remonstrations supported by the LCC, the shelter remained.<sup>59</sup>



The theatre reopened in November 1880 with Shakespeare productions starring the celebrated American actor Edwin Booth, but they were not well received. A diet of melodrama and pantomime soon resumed under the bankrupt Gooch's wife, the actress Fannie Leslie. Meanwhile Phipps's recasting failed to solve the problems of the Princess's Theatre's construction, capacity and awkward access. Its deficiencies now attracted the vigilance of the Metropolitan Board of Works, increasingly exercised by theatre safety. In 1882 an inspection by Captain Shaw of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade gave the Princess's a clean bill of health, but a second report, commissioned by the Board's architect from J. G. Buckle, was more critical. As a result various changes were requested.<sup>60</sup> Despite some alterations further ones were demanded, turning Phipps and the owners intransigent. The deadlock persisted for years. Phipps's son-in-law A. Blomfield Jackson produced an improvement scheme in 1897 after the lease changed hands, yet still no progress was made.<sup>61</sup>

In 1900 the American vaudeville impresario Benjamin F. Keith of Boston bought the theatre and adjacent properties, aiming to rebuild and introduce his 'continuous variety' shows to London. But he was unable to get possession of the basement, let as wine vaults. After further long delays and a court case which Keith lost, the project lapsed in 1904.<sup>62</sup> Meanwhile from 1902 he allowed the Princess's to go dark. With only short subleases on offer from Keith, rebuilding schemes from William Hunt (1905-6), W. G. R. Sprague (1907) and Frank Verity (1908) for different potential purchasers all failed. So the theatre never acquired the long-sought up-to-date auditorium of modern construction.<sup>63</sup>

In 1912 the Princess's doom seemed imminent. Mary Clark, the hotelier who had recently presided over the rebuilding of the Berners Hotel and the creation of the Hotel York Ltd, persuaded her board that an even bigger hotel for 900 guests could be built on the site. Accordingly the architects Boehmer & Gibbs sketched out a hotel design for 900 guests; a Howard de Walden lease

for ninety years was sought and a prospectus for £465,000 issued. This ambitious scheme, which extended well beyond the theatre limits and included a high baroque tower over the Oxford Street entrance, earned LCC approval in January 1913 but then stagnated. An annexe on the east side of Adam and Eve Court running through to 75–79 Wells Street was still under consideration by Bomer & Gibbs (now so called) in the early 1920s, but that too came to nothing.<sup>64</sup>

In 1920 Lord Waring of Waring & Gillow, riding high on First World War profits, announced the purchase of the derelict theatre site for an annexe to his own store across the west side of Winsley Street. Waring's plans were fluid, so the purchase was not completed until 1923. Undated drawings show an extension of Waring & Gillow covering the whole site and connected to the main building by bridges across Winsley Street. A later scheme of 1928 by Mewès and Davis, architects, suggested a shallower building, again connected across Winsley Street by bridges. That too stalled when Waring & Gillow's finances collapsed in 1930 and the company had to be reconstructed for a second time.<sup>65</sup>

### *Princess House*

A solution finally emerged early in 1931 when Covent Garden Properties Ltd, a syndicate very active on the inter-war property market in Central London, bought the freehold of the long-dead theatre and its environs. Elcock & Sutcliffe, architects, came in to design the buildings currently on the site, named Princess House and erected in 1931–3.<sup>66</sup> The site thus acquired was confined on the Oxford Street side to a restricted frontage between No. 146 and Mappin & Webb at Nos 156–162, where it is usually now numbered 150, but at the back towards Eastcastle Street it took in the whole breadth of the block from Adam and Eve Court to Winsley Street. The rear portions were divided between extra space for Waring & Gillow and offices or workrooms

mainly let to firms in the garment trades. Woolworth occupied the basement and ground floor of the Oxford Street frontage for retailing purposes, plus a small portion of the upper floors for services. The architecture of Princess House adopts the pleasant streamlined modernism of the early 1930s, with long strips of windows within brick and stone fronts towards Eastcastle Street and along the flanks. The stone-clad Oxford Street front is a competent essay in commercial Art Deco, with lively treatment to the fenestration and prominent sockets for flagposts. The shop fronts have been several times changed. After Woolworth left, Princess House in 1986 became the main Oxford Street store of HMV, claimed as 'the biggest music shop in the world, covering 60,000 square feet over three floors', but was abandoned by that ailing firm in 2014 in favour of Sports Direct.<sup>67</sup>