

Chapter 7

308–332 Oxford Street

Old Cavendish Street to Vere Street

Between Old Cavendish and Vere Streets, the Oxford Street frontage is split between two short blocks of about 140ft and 100ft width respectively, divided by the passageway known as Chapel Place (formerly Chapel Court). But the two blocks have quite different characters. The larger, eastern one covers a deep, regular rectangle stretching back to Henrietta Place, and is entirely taken up by the House of Fraser's department store, formerly D. H. Evans, built in a striking if eccentric style in 1935–7. Its western counterpart has always been shallower and less regular in geometry, because it backs on to St Peter's, Vere Street, behind. Probably because of its modest size, it has never been gobbled up by the great department stores situated to its east and west. Today its two late Victorian and Edwardian buildings give welcome relief in scale to their surroundings.

Old Cavendish Street to Chapel Place (Nos 308–318)

Early History

The earliest buildings on this block dated back to the 1720s when building on the Cavendish-Harley estate began. Seven premises originally occupied the frontage between Cavendish Street and Chapel Place; the largest, the Oxford Arms, formed the centrepiece, flanked by three smaller houses on each side. Building agreements for these were made with John Newton, bricklayer,

Walter Lee, mason, and Benjamin Timbrell and Thomas Phillips, carpenters. Timbrell and Phillips were among the premier London builders of their day; at the same time they were involved directly behind these sites in building St Peter's (at first the Oxford Chapel) and houses in Henrietta Place in association with James Gibbs.¹

The Oxford Arms, which was on Timbrell's take, had been built by 1725.² By the 1780s it was numbered 144, in a block running from No. 141 at the Old Cavendish Street corner to No. 147 at the Chapel Place equivalent. It was then taken over by Frederick Fladong, and became known as Fladong's Hotel, a name which held sufficient renown to survive long after Fladong's death in 1799. It became known as a naval hotel, just as the nearby Ibbetson's was associated with clergymen, and featured in popular novels of the day as well as Conan Doyle's historical novel *Rodney Stone*. By about 1830 it had expanded into adjoining houses in Old Cavendish Street and Chapel Place and contained numerous suites of bed and sitting rooms, a coffee room, 'handsome entrance-halls, convenient bar, and superior domestic offices – warm and cold baths'.³

Until the formation of the Army and Navy Club in the late 1830s, Fladong's operated as an unofficial club house. Tallis identifies it as 'Lovegrove Fladongs Family Hotel Baths', William Lovegrove being then the proprietor. His son, John Edward Lovegrove, moved the hotel business round the corner to 22–23 Old Cavendish Street in 1854, when the furniture and effects of the original building were sold.⁴ The Oxford Street site was rebuilt as shops in 1855–9. In 1862 the City firm of P. & S. Beyfus took the new No. 144 as 'furniture galleries', but this proved a short-lived venture as they retired from business three years later.

The smaller properties to either side of Fladong's had all been occupied by single shops until they began to be absorbed by D. H. Evans. None was of particular account, but at No. 146 in the 1790s there was a short-lived plumber and engine-maker, Orgill & Simpkin. This may have been the enterprise of

Joseph Orgill, painter and glazier of 24 Old Cavendish Street near by, whose stock was sold after his death in 1796.⁵ Orgill was superseded at that latter address by a private 'museum' established by Richard Summers, a dealer in paintings, curiosities, old china and natural history. When Summers retired in 1810, he auctioned off his stock in trade, which included paintings ('by the finest Masters'), miniatures ('by Oliver, Petitot, Cooper') assorted antiques and curios, firearms, armour, and jewelry, as well as a 'large quantity of shells for grotto work'. Summers is chiefly remembered today because of a half-penny token that he issued in 1797 bearing 'A Wild-Man's Head, from the Land of Jesso' to be seen at his museum, now sought after by collectors.⁶

House of Fraser

The House of Fraser's flagship London store now occupies the whole of this island site. It was built in 1935–7 to designs by Louis Blanc as D. H. Evans, one of the West End's foremost drapery establishments, though by that date its founder was long out of the picture. In style it is perhaps the closest on Oxford Street to the big American stores of the inter-war years. A hint of ocean-liner streamlined modernism is perceptible in the protruding fins that divide the no-nonsense grid of windows, set off originally by a sleek wrap-around canopy that elegantly sheltered window-shoppers. This new store replaced a succession of earlier buildings occupied by D. H. Evans as the company expanded from humble beginnings at No. 147 next to the Chapel Place corner in 1879.

D. H. Evans, 1879–1906

Of all the major players along Oxford Street who prospered in its Victorian heyday, Dan Harries Evans's story is perhaps the least happy.⁷ His rise to fame and fortune was typical enough. The son of a Welsh farmer, he was born

in 1855 or 6 and raised in Abergwilli, Carmarthenshire, the youngest but one of six children. At the age of 15 he was serving his apprenticeship with John Roderick, draper, in Llandeilo.⁸ It is possible that he was the D. H. Evans, 'Hosiers and Hatters', of Merthyr advertising vacancies for a junior hand and an apprentice in 1876,⁹ but by about 1877 he had moved to London and opened a small draper's shop in Westminster Bridge Road. From there he relocated to 147 Oxford Street in 1879. He is recorded there in the 1881 census with his wife and two-year-old son, Frank, along with nine live-in assistants – all but one female – two female domestics and a local lad working as a porter.¹⁰

In the early 1870s Evans's future wife, Elizabeth Harris, was working as a dressmaker and sales woman, living at home with her father, William Harris, a Baptist Minister, in Aberdare. They may have met either through the drapery trade, or through the Welsh Chapel in Eastcastle Street, Marylebone. Dan Evans was closely associated with the chapel, and Elizabeth's father was invited to preach there in about 1877. In later years, as D. H. Evans prospered, the couple retained their link with the chapel, contributing funds for its rebuilding. Dan Evans was ordained as a deacon by his father-in-law at the first service in the new building in November 1889.¹¹ Furthermore, Owen Lewis, the architect of the Welsh Chapel, was employed by Evans for alterations to his store in 1884 and 1887.¹²

The success of D. H. Evans was swift, and the expansion of the business during the 1880s and early '90s little short of meteoric. From one shop in 1879, by 1894 the business occupied more than a dozen premises. An illustration of the shop published in *Modern London, The World's Metropolis* in 1888 shows it occupying three contiguous premises on Oxford Street at the corner of Chapel Place (by then Nos 314–320, the corner house, though only a single property, being numbered 318–320). Goods were displayed in the ground and first-floor windows, and lettering advertised the store and its wares, including millinery workrooms, on all the upper-floor windows. The

shop was already being described as one of the largest drapery establishments in London at that time. As business prospered, Dan and Elizabeth Evans moved from their rooms above the shop. By 1888 they were living in Cornwall Terrace, Regent's Park, and later bought a country estate at Pangbourne, on the Thames in Berkshire.

Welsh society in London in the closing decades of the nineteenth century was close-knit. The young David Lloyd George became acquainted with the Evanses, and although he seems to have rather liked Dan – 'a lightheaded featherbrained fellow with some good nature and much practical shrewdness' – he found Elizabeth contemptible: 'she is clever but purse proud ... I hated and despised her from the moment she talked about the Welsh Society in London being "led by drapers' assistants"'.¹³

In 1894 Dan Evans decided to cash in on his success. A limited liability company was formed to acquire the business, paying Evans around £160,000. One of the aims of the new company was diversification – with plans to open a range of new departments, from ironmongery and glassware to grocery and general provisions. Whilst the store did in time stock soft furnishings, china, glass, novelties and stationery, it never seems to have made any forays into groceries.¹⁴

Evans retained a majority share holding and was the first managing director, on a salary of £750 a year, but his attention had drifted elsewhere, and he resigned in 1897, though he retained his seat on the board of directors. The Shooter's Hill House estate that he had bought at Pangbourne with the profits of the sale of the store seems to have tempted him into property speculation. He built houses, shops and a clubhouse at Pangbourne, which did very well, but his investment in Mansions Consolidated Ltd, set up to acquire property in and around Hampstead, proved a financial disaster and led to him borrowing from moneylenders. Bankruptcy was looming in 1914, and after a prolonged absence from board meetings he forfeited his seat on the Board of Directors of D. H. Evans. In February 1915 he resigned as a

trustee for debenture stockholders.¹⁵ His wife and sons had set up an independent drapery store on Brompton Road, Kensington, under the name Tudor Brothers, around 1900, but this was another casualty of Dan Evans's debts.¹⁶ (The Evans's second son was named Tudor Evans.) After that the family seems to have kept going for a while with a hotel at Marble Arch. Latterly living in Norfolk Crescent, just behind Edgware Road, Evans died in March 1929, leaving just £120 9s.¹⁷

By the time that D. H. Evans & Co. was formed in 1894, the shop had expanded beyond the bounds of the Old Cavendish Street to Chapel Place block, though it had not then acquired the whole of that frontage. East of Old Cavendish Street, on the present John Lewis site, it had acquired leases of 290–298 Oxford Street. That was followed early in 1895 by the acquisition of Brandon & Company's lease of Nos 304 and 306 and their stock, swiftly followed by that of Nos 300 and 302, previously occupied by the embroiderer R. Helbronner. Alterations were made to these premises to designs by A. E. Hughes, and Frederick Sage & Co. supplied new shop fittings. Changes to the Building Acts started to make an impact on how the buildings were used: if any person slept on the premises a fire resisting floor had to be made between the business and the residential portions of the building. To avoid the additional cost of fireproofing, upper floors were used for storage or office space and separate accommodation acquired for staff.¹⁸

Amongst the early directors of the newly formed limited company were a number of individuals associated with the great Brompton Road store, Harrods, including (Sir) Alfred Newton, chairman of Harrods from 1889, and Richard Burbidge, Harrods' general manager. The first resident general manager of D. H. Evans, Ernest Webb, who was appointed in 1897, was also from the Harrods stable. Another long-standing director was (Sir) James Boyton, whose good relations with the Howard de Walden Estate, the company's ground landlord, frequently helped in matters of property negotiations. (At Harrods, one of the directors was also a local estate agent.)¹⁹

The rebuilding of 1907–9

Over the next few years the company continued to flourish with sharply increasing profits, enough to justify the erection of a new building on its main site west of Old Cavendish Street. One of the spurs to such a major undertaking was probably the rebuilding of Waring and Gillow, but there was also the announcement of the new American-style department store to be built by H. G. Selfridge in partnership with S. J. Waring at the other end of Oxford Street. Selfridges was more of a direct competitor, aimed at a similar sector of the market. When Selfridges opened in 1909, the same year that the west block of D. H. Evans was completed, Ernest Webb took the unprecedented step for a drapery house of placing a full-page advertisement for D. H. Evans in some of the newspapers, advertising its summer sale, new millinery showroom and new restaurant 'in our Marble Building... decorated in French style' complete with French Chef, first class cuisine but moderate prices.²⁰

The desire to rebuild was made viable by a share issue to raise part of the capital, by the acquisition of 312 Oxford Street, which completed their holdings between Old Cavendish Street and Chapel Place, and by renegotiating the company's leases for the entire block with the Howard de Walden Estate to obtain extended terms.²¹

John Murray was chosen as the architect in May 1906. He may have been selected because of his position as the Surveyor to the Commissioners of Woods and Forests and his involvement in the reconstruction of Regent Street. His evident good relations with the London County Council's Architect, W. E. Riley, and his experience in negotiating his way through the requirements of the London Building Acts were no doubt recommendations, and he proved to be a shrewd choice. By mid-July Murray had drawn up plans and an elevation, and was asked to prepare a model of the elevation for the Board of Directors.

The Howard de Walden Estate suggested a number of revisions to the plans: four pilasters on the Oxford Street front were considered too narrow at 18 inches, and 2ft 9ins proposed instead, and they wished there to be an extra mansard roof on the Oxford Street elevation. The new store was erected in four separate sections with a steel framework partly composed of solid steel columns to carry heavy loads over long spans. Moreland & Co. Ltd were awarded the steelwork contract, and Howard & Co. the building contract after agreeing to reduce their tender from nearly £31,000 to £26,419 for the building and £847 for a subway linking the west and east blocks beneath Old Cavendish Street. In later phases of construction, C. F. Kearley supplanted Howard & Co.²²

The *Building News* noted that the new store had been modelled after careful study of numerous large trade buildings in Paris, Vienna and Berlin. The principal elevations to Oxford Street and Old Cavendish Street were faced with Greek Pentelikon marble (as was the recently built Mappin & Webb) relieved by Greek Cipollino marble columns and pilasters. In outward appearance the rebuilt store achieved a hint of Parisian style, but the restrictive London Building Acts constricted the internal layout which remained far more compartmentalized than contemporary continental stores. Murray had devoted considerable effort to persuade the LCC to relax the rules for a drapery store, and convinced the Council that the drapery trade was not of the dangerous character contemplated by the Building Act. Under the Act considerable restrictions were imposed on trades that used explosive or inflammable materials, limiting the size of any single compartment to 250,000 cubic feet. Riley, the LCC's chief architect, was sympathetic, but the London Fire Brigade took more persuasion, and Murray had to agree to various fire precautions: the structural steelwork was encased in two inches of fire-retardants, show windows were separated from the rest of the building by fire-resisting screens, many other windows were glazed with fire-resisting

material, and fire appliances were installed, along with a telephone line to the nearest fire station.²³

Internally, the closest link to French store planning was the large open well through the first and second floors in the central section, top-lit by a lantern light, featuring the main staircase, a modest version of Parisian stores such as Paul Sédille's *Au Printemps* of the early 1880s. The main staircase was constructed of reinforced concrete, covered with Austrian oak and enclosed with a wrought-iron balustrade. There was no escalator, though Harrods had installed a moving belt – a very early form of escalator – in 1898. In the eastern section of the store there was a corner entrance with an island showcase.²⁴

Special features within the store included a restaurant on the second floor, as noted above, panelled in oak with low-relief modeled panels by F. Brook Hitch finished in 'old ivory' representing Harvest, Commerce, Industry, Science and Trade. On the same floor were a ladies' lounge and a gentlemen's smoking room. In the sub-basement D. H. Evans offered storage for fur coats out of season. As for the staff, the third and attic storeys housed kitchen and staff dining rooms. The staff and trades entrance was at the rear in Chapel Place – here the marble facing made way for a mixture of Portland stone and Crowborough brick, with quoins in Lawrence's red bricks. A service lift was located near the back entrance. In the basement was the packing room with a 'parcel-transporter', a moving conveyor belt which received goods from the various departments via spiral chutes. From here they were conveyed to the dispatch department in the east block on the other side of Old Cavendish Street. A sub-basement housed the boiler room, electric switch-room, strong room and the plant for working the cash tubes. These last were connected from their numerous stations throughout the building to the cash bureau in the basement of the east block.²⁵

Once the west block had been completed the company turned its attention to staff accommodation. James Boyton paid for the erection of a

hostel for female assistants in Bolsover Street (Bentinck House, designed by W. Henry White) which he then leased to the company from 1912. That same year Lord Howard de Walden offered 999-year leases to his tenants, and the company, through Boyton, began negotiations. Also in 1912, twelve plate-glass windows were smashed by suffragettes – all swiftly replaced apart from the curved glass for the island showcase which took three weeks to make.²⁶

The reconstruction of 1936–7

In the years following the First World War the company continued its policy of expansion, purchasing neighbouring properties and businesses. Having already purchased 999-year leases from the Howard de Walden Estate, in 1927 they obtained the freehold of much of the west block.²⁷ Harrods' directors tightened their grip on D. H. Evans in 1928 when Harrods Limited acquired the whole of the ordinary shares. Sir Richard Woodman Burbidge became chairman, with William Webb (Ernest Webb's son) as managing director. Burbidge was the driving force behind the growth of D. H. Evans over the next decade. He set about consolidating the business on one site with a view to erecting a large new store. He also introduced many reforms in working practices, new methods of selling and display, and improved conditions for staff. Burbidge brought in Louis Blanc, Harrods' architect. Blanc was a London Scot, nephew of the Edinburgh architect Hippolyte J. Blanc. He had worked in the LCC Architect's Department between 1903 and 1920, after which he assisted on the rebuilding of Swan & Edgar at Piccadilly Circus (taken over by Harrods in 1920) with another London Scot, J. J. Joass. Blanc's first involvement with the D. H. Evans buildings was uninspiring – filling in the well-holes of both floors of the western block.²⁸

Thus it was under the guidance of Harrods that D. H. Evans was rebuilt, substantially as it stands today, and the deal struck with John Lewis to sell the company's properties on the east side of Old Cavendish Street.

Spedan Lewis made a provisional offer of £825,000 in December 1933, and Louis Blanc was requested to provide preliminary plans for a new store by the end of February the following year.²⁹

Acquiring all of the island site between Chapel Place and Old Cavendish Street right back to Henrietta Place had been accomplished over many years. Properties facing Henrietta Place included the Crown pub on the corner with Old Cavendish Street, and the Dysart Hotel on the corner with Chapel Place. The rest were small wholesale shops mostly doing business in buttons, lace, and silks.

The new D. H. Evans store was built in two parts beginning on the northern half of the site, which was cleared in January 1935. This section was finished and opened by February 1936, when the contents of the south block were moved into it. Work then began on demolishing Murray's building. This presented much difficulty; the reinforced concrete staircase had to be burned and broken until reduced to fragments. The building contractors were James Carmichael Ltd and the steel contractors Moreland Hayne and Co. Ltd. Both before and during construction a number of members of staff made trips to America to visit large stores there. Hudson's store in Detroit, designed by Smith, Hinchman & Grylls and begun in 1923, was a particular source of inspiration, with its bold fenestration pattern in a repetitive grid and large open floor spaces. There were also trips to new stores nearer to home, both in the United Kingdom and on the Continent.

As with the 1907 building, the architect was requested to produce models of the building. The design was modified several times, necessitating numerous models to be constructed. These included a full-size model of the canopy, a fixed structure instead of the usual pull-down canvas canopies, and a model of the escalators. This was the second store to gain approval from the LCC for a constructional canopy extending all round the building, following quickly on a similar feature at Bourne & Hollingsworth. Meetings of board members were held weekly from October 1934; every aspect of the building

was considered, and often reconsidered many times, usually with Blanc in attendance. Revisions to the plans continued through the early months of 1935. Comments from the Howard de Walden Estate's surveyor and architect (Colonel Blount and V. Royle Gould) resulted in the seventh floor being set back in Old Cavendish Street and the sixth and seventh floors likewise in Henrietta Place, despite a loss of over 3,000 sq. ft of floor space.³⁰

With the two halves of the building linked together, the new store opened in February 1937. Recent relaxation of the height restrictions imposed on trade buildings by the London Building Acts enabled the new store to rise to 100ft, 20ft more than the old limit and productive of an additional two storeys. Thus D. H. Evans had nine storeys above ground, over a basement and sub-basement. Six floors were for trading, the remainder for staff, offices and plant. By this date the cubic capacity restriction for any single compartment had been doubled, to 500,000 cubic feet. Vertical compartments had to be cut off from horizontal spaces, so stairs, escalators and lifts had to be in a separate compartment. Nevertheless, the far greater cubic feet allowance meant that London stores could at last be designed on American lines, with large open floors restricted only by the columns that were part of the building's steel frame. At D. H. Evans, the internal columns were cased in concrete, as they had been in Murray's building, since this was still part of the building regulations. The casing then had to be wound with wire and rendered in cement. The flooring consisted of pre-cast concrete beams laid rather like wooden floorboards, but resting on the steel beams. These were topped in a layer of concrete, then pumice concrete and finally linoleum. A degree of prefabrication enabled the building to go up rapidly. Most of the component parts were made off site: the steelwork at Silvertown, the stonework was quarried and hewn to exact size at Portland, the reconstructed stone made at Leicester, the windows were made at Chester and the floor and column casings at Twickenham and Waltham Abbey. The only unforeseen difficulty was the discovery of a stream running 20ft below Oxford Street.³¹

The frontage to Oxford Street was a relatively modest 136ft, but the site was deep, running back 300ft to Henrietta Street.³² The building is faced in Portland stone up to 80ft, originally over a pale-grey granite facing to the ground floor, while the top two floors, which are stepped back behind a parapet, are faced with reconstructed Portland stone. Inward-opening steel casement windows arranged in threes give a strong grid pattern to the elevations in the manner of Hudson's Detroit store. Blanc repeated the motif for Stuttaford's department store in Cape Town, which he designed in 1937, and he was likely behind the stripped-down version of the grid for the elevations of the Kendal Milne store in Manchester (acquired by Harrods in 1919), where he worked with the local architect J. S. Beaumont in 1938-9.

The great height of the building gave it presence on the street and produced one of its most exciting spaces inside: the escalator hall. It was only following a visit to America by C. H. Bromhead, the store's general manager, in April or May 1935 that the final form of the escalators was settled, at a substantial additional cost of over £13,000.³³ The rebuilt D. H. Evans has been claimed as the first English store to have escalators serving all floors.³⁴ Placed midway along the Chapel Place side of the building, the hall contained not just the sequence of escalators but also staircases and 'high-speed' lifts (the upper trading floor could be reached in one and a half minutes).³⁵ The simplification of accessing all the floors from one spot equalized the trading value of the floors. It was generally understood that the trading value of a floor decreased in proportion to its height above the street. But the hall was not just designed to be a functional means of hastening shoppers to their required department, in its finish and colour it was also intended to be a glamorous focal point, a place to be seen or from which to view all the store had to offer. The walls and pillars were of delicate beige-pink Travertine marble, the floors of polished cork, producing a 'soft, brown glow', the fibrous plaster ceiling was in a 'modernistic design', the sheen of metal work

on stairs, escalators and lifts was achieved in 'silver and copper bronze surfaces, satin finished'.³⁶

The heating, lighting and ventilation were a mixture of the tried and tested and the novel. The building was air-conditioned, allowing the store to be cooled in the summer with fresh air drawn in at first-floor level, filtered, passed through a washer chamber comprising a fine mist of water which cooled the air, and thence to the various floors via vertical shafts. In winter, steam-heated ceiling panels near the outer walls produced background heating supplemented by four shafts delivering warmed air. Each ceiling panel had a separate valve, and the temperature of each floor could be regulated by a thermostat. Lighting was particularly important. Showroom light fittings on the upper floors were partly recessed in the ceilings, built up in metal framework, glazed with streaky opal glass or flashed opal.

On the ground floor were fashion accessories and fabrics arranged either side of a broad central aisle with exits at either end to Oxford Street and Henrietta Street. Branching from each side 'miniature, self-contained shops' sold specific accessories or goods, each defined beneath its own canopy, with diffused light illuminating the merchandise displayed beneath.

Women's clothing took up the entire first and second floors. Furs on the second floor were displayed against a background of Indian white mahogany, and there was a fur storage section resembling a small bank, with a vault of its own, while the cold storage in the sub-basement could store 'many thousands of pounds worth'.

The third floor contained three quite separate sections: the children's department, household and travel. The children's department was the largest, taking up about two thirds of the floor and not only selling outfits but also providing two playrooms for the under-sixes - Peter Pan's Playground. 'The houses of Peter Pan and Wendy take the form of two huge trees which spread their branches over an enchanting ornamental pond and fountain.'

Half of the fourth floor was devoted to hairdressing and beauty salons. For beauty culture there were nine sound-proof beauty rooms with day or night lighting. Materials used were prepared in the company's own laboratories, adjoining which were workrooms for the production of postiche. The rest of the floor was given over to the gifts department.

The fifth floor was the highest one devoted to the public and contained the restaurant, furnished in brown, beige and rose. Plush-seated alcoves ran along both sides while the rest of the floor had circular tables arranged in a grid of squares around the waitressing stations. Above the restaurant were staff areas. On the sixth floor were workrooms, stock rooms and a telephone exchange with a special section for telephone orders. On the seventh floor was a staff cafeteria, rest rooms and sitting-rooms for staff and a sick room with attendant nurse. At the other end of the store in the basement were the staff cloakrooms, and the display and dispatch departments, while the sub-basement contained the boilers and air-conditioning plant.³⁷

At the outbreak of the Second World War, the new D. H. Evans store was only a little over two years old. Trade slumped and large numbers of staff left to join the Armed Forces. D. H. Evans formed a Home Guard platoon with Bromhead, the General Manager, as Platoon Officer. Later a 'Stores Company' was formed and D. H. Evans was its headquarters. A rifle range was installed on the sixth floor and uniforms were altered, if necessary, by workroom staff. During the Blitz the Borough Council took over a part of the basement as an air raid shelter, though this had to be evacuated on the night that John Lewis's store was bombed due to flooding from a burst water main. From 1942 a substantial part of the store was given over to the Ministry of Works for the General Post Office, along with its staff of over 1,000 women. They occupied the second, third and a half of the fourth floors. They remained for some time after the war ended, gradually moving out between 1946 and 1951. Clothes rationing, introduced in 1941 and only ending in

February 1949, was one of many war-time measures to have an adverse impact on trade.

After the Second World War D. H. Evans bought out J. F. Rockhey Ltd, a drapery business with stores in Torquay and Newton Abbott, though these continued to trade under their own name. Then in 1954 Harrods acquired the entire preference share capital of D. H. Evans, and shortly after Harrods Ltd was acquired by House of Fraser Ltd. Each of these separate stores retained their original names, and even as late as 1980 the D. H. Evans name was used for a new branch store in Wood Green's 'Shopping City'. The Oxford Street store was refurbished and in parts remodelled between 1982 and 1985. Further alterations were carried out in 2000 when the store dropped the D. H. Evans name on the outside of the building. The entrances were remodelled, shifting the main entrance in the centre of the Oxford Street front to the corners of the building. The other main alteration externally is the restyling of the canopy.³⁸

As a result of a downturn in trading, the House of Fraser group in Summer 2018 announced the closure of many of its stores, including its Oxford Street flagship. However after Mike Ashley of Sports Direct intervened with a rescue deal, it was announced that the Oxford Street store would be reprieved.³⁹

Chapel Place to Vere Street (Nos 324–332)

These addresses cover a short 90ft frontage, sandwiched between the two giant department stores of the House of Fraser and Debenhams, and flanked by Vere Street on the west side and Chapel Place on the east. The early Georgian buildings on this block have long since been swept away. On the corner of Chapel Place Nos 324 and 326 were built in 1878 to designs by A. E. Hughes for Frederick Marsh: a matching pair of narrow two-bay houses with shops. The rest of the block including the Vere Street corner is occupied by

bulky commercial premises built in 1901 to designs by John Macvicar Anderson.

Early History

This section of the Oxford Street frontage was originally developed under Cavendish-Harley leases of 1719 to Joel Johnson, a local bricklayer who put up three buildings here, leasing the westernmost to Thomas Johnson, blacksmith of Marylebone; this included a smith's shop. Thomas Johnson retained possession until around 1737, but in the 1720s was living in Holles Street where his son, Thomas, an eminent woodcarver, was born. In his memoirs, Thomas the younger described his father as a well-known builder who had served his apprenticeship to a bricklayer at Croydon. After marrying his master's eldest daughter he went to London, building several houses in Marylebone and adjacent parishes. These included 'The house known by the sign of the Valiant Trooper, the corner of Vere-Street, in Oxford-Street; two adjoining in Vere-Street; and one in Oxford-Street; one large house in Cavendish-Square', and others in the Soho area.⁴⁰

Behind the Oxford Street premises the ground was developed by John Newton, John James and William Barlow, bricklayers; the carpenters Benjamin Timbrell and Thomas Phillips; and one Thomas Bliss. The sculptor Michael Rysbrack lived at 3 Vere Street from 1725 to 1770.⁴¹

The original three properties fronting Oxford Street were later divided to create five, and then six, with consequent irregularities in the street numbers. For a while the three eastern houses were each numbered as 148, followed by 149 to 151. The confusion was only resolved when the entirety of Oxford Street was renumbered in 1880. In the early nineteenth century the houses were occupied from east to west by a hosier, a bookseller, a lottery office, a medicine warehouse, and a linen draper on the corner of Vere Street. In Vere Street and Chapel Place there were a few remaining private houses

but otherwise a mix of similar shops. But the largest presence was Ibbotson's Hotel at 3–5 Vere Street which extended all the way back to Chapel Place. Northwards again in Chapel Court Mr Smith's Cold and Hot Baths could be found at Nos 12 and 13, also occupying extensive if higgledy-piggledy premises.⁴²

When John Sanger was granted a lease of the patent medicine warehouse at No. 150 in 1819 his terms noted that he had 'almost rebuilt his house'⁴³ As illustrated on his trade card, the shopfront was typical of its date – the central entrance flanked by multi-paned windows extending between the fascia and stallriser. Bottles seem to have been displayed, in the manner then favoured in chemists' or druggists' shops. But medicine warehouses like Sanger's did not make their stock on the premises, and many of the patent medicines that they sold were scorned by physicians and associated with quackery. Sanger had been in business here since at least 1809, when he was listed as a supplier of Foster's Rheumatic Drops. He had taken over as a going concern the business of H. Jeboult and Co. (operating here from about 1797), but as the fascia suggests, the business had been inherited from a medicine warehouse at this address established by William Bacon in 1789 and claimed as the first 'West of Temple Bar'. He advertised the opening of his business, with the requisite licence, as selling all public medicines sanctioned by 'Royal letters Patent or the Test of general approbation ... Warranted fresh and genuine' supplied by a dozen or so 'eminent Proprietors and Venders of *Medicines of established Repute and Efficacy*'.⁴⁴ Sangers were still in business in 1893, latterly with a warehouse and showroom at 489 Oxford Street, by which time they not only stocked medicinal items, but also perfumery and 'toilet requisites' as well as a range of other products: druggists' sundries, lozenges, mineral waters, bronchitis kettles, chest protectors and respirators.⁴⁵

At the corner of Vere Street, sometimes numbered 151, sometimes 150 or 1 Vere Street, there were either woollen drapers, linen drapers or silk mercers, at least from the early 1800s into the 1860s when the Marylebone

branch of the Sun Fire and Life Office was opened here. Indeed the character of the shops between Chapel Place and Vere Street changed little throughout the century.

Present buildings

Nos 324 and 326. This pair of houses and shops dates from a rebuilding of 1878 by Frederick Marsh, a bootmaker who had inherited the business from his father, also Frederick, a cordwainer. Marsh senior had been in business at what became No. 326 (previously 148) since the 1830s. His premises are shown by Tallis as one of the smallest in this sector, just two bays wide, and of three storeys, but by the mid-century he was employing fifty workers (30 men and 20 women) and may have expanded.⁴⁶ Frederick Marsh junior chose A. E. Hughes as his architect, probably on the recommendation of the Portland Estate, where Hughes had been assisting Henry Baker the estate surveyor until the latter's death that year. Of the many jobs Hughes subsequently acquired on the estate, this will have been among the earliest. Architecturally Nos 324 and 326 are typical of the period – a little old-fashioned, but boasting an array of decoration on the window dressings. The original stock brick façade has been painted over at No. 326, lessening the impact of the stone dressings. Marsh's firm remained at No. 324 until just after the Sun Insurance Office was rebuilt. They then moved to 292 Regent Street, and their old shop was taken over by the Aerated Bread Company.⁴⁷

Apart from the frequently replaced shopfronts, there have been no major alterations to this pair, which have considerable value in the streetscape. They are a reminder of the character of Oxford Street in its late Victorian heyday, when surface decoration was the order of the day. A notable instance is the ornament on the narrow Chapel Place front, where the blank wall of the upper storeys sports a tall blind arch, dripping with festoons and cornucopias, and sheltering under a deep modillion cornice.

No. 326 is of interest for the presence of F. B. Goodyer who had a shop selling artistic fabrics here in the 1890s. Goodyer had been in partnership with Arthur Lazenby Liberty, and when the partnership was dissolved in 1888 Goodyer opened an 'Aesthetic Gallery' at 155 New Bond Street for the sale of 'Artistic Fabrics and Eastern Curios'.⁴⁸ Goodyer sold furnishings, fabric, furniture, Indian jewellery and decorative bric-à-brac, generally undercutting Liberty on price. In 1900 Goodyers consolidated operations in Regent Street, and gave up the gallery at 155 New Bond Street, the Oxford Street shop and another in Brompton Road. Goodyer may have come by the lease of No. 326 through an acquaintance with James Boyton, the auctioneer so closely involved with the Portland Estate. In 1891 the Boytons and Goodyers were staying in the same lodging house in Brighton on census night. The couples were close in age.⁴⁹

Nos 328–332, with a conspicuous return to Vere Street, dates from 1901–2, when previous buildings here were rebuilt to designs by J. Macvicar Anderson as the West End branch of the Sun Fire & Life Insurance Office, which had been on this site since 1865.

The Sun Fire Office was established in 1710 with its main office near the Royal Exchange. A Marylebone branch office originated as a semi-independent business run from 1824 onwards by the Freeth family, at first in Lisson Grove, later in Welbeck and Wigmore Streets, the original Charles Freeth having started out as a clerk in the office of the Eyre Estate in St John's Wood. In 1865 Charles Freeth junior drew the head office's attention to the well-placed site at the Vere Street corner of Oxford Street, where he knew the tenants of the existing building were willing to sell. The company agreed to take advantage of Freeth's good relations with the Portland Estate and negotiate an extension to the existing lease of the property. The building in question, probably the original Georgian one on that site, was known as 1

Vere Street. It had two windows facing Oxford Street but was longer towards the side street, where the front was set in a broad expanse of brickwork.

Working with the builders Holland & Hannen, the Sun's surveyor, Charles Freeman, inserted a new office front on the ground floor in a suitable Italianate style, with rusticated window surrounds featuring lion-head keystones; a frieze bearing the company name amidst paterae and triglyphs broke out in segmental pediments over the main entrance and halfway along the side flank. These bore the company's sun-face emblem set in a laurel wreath nestling in deeply carved cornucopias. The upper floors were let as a private house. The address of the office became 322 Oxford Street after the change of street numbering in 1880.⁵⁰

In 1900, with the Oxford Street branch by then fully in the hands of the head office and the lease due to run out, the Sun Insurance's management committee resolved to seek a rebuilding lease for an enlarged site covering 328–332 Oxford Street and 1 and 2 Vere Street. As well as a new insurance office, shops and living accommodation were to be provided in the block. In view of the 'advanced age' of the company's architect, F. W. Porter, they turned instead to the well-known John Macvicar Anderson.⁵¹

Anderson's new stone-faced building, erected in 1901–2 by Higgs & Hill in a restrained commercial neoclassical style with carving by George Hawkings,⁵² was about a storey and a half taller than its predecessor. The entrance was shifted to the chamfered corner, where the sun emblem and cornucopias reappeared over the door within a broken pediment. The public office occupied the ground floor facing Vere Street, but the Oxford Street frontage was reserved for a shop. The middle storeys were neatly defined by giant fluted pilasters and a deep modillion cornice, above which came a third floor slightly set back, and then a mansard roof behind a balustraded parapet. The composition survives with few alterations externally, barring the replacement of the shopfronts, and the removal of the original ground-floor windows, carved pediment and corner doorway. When the buildings next

north, 3–4 Vere Street, were added in 1911–12 to designs by Lionel Barratt, they took their cue from the Sun Fire ensemble.⁵³

Initially the drapers Plummer Roddis, a firm with a number of stores in the south-east of England (later acquired by Debenhams) occupied the new shop, with its front at 328–330 Oxford Street. This was taken over in 1908 by the Hanan-Gingell Shoe Co. Ltd. and remodelled by G. Thrale Jell. Jell's new shop front was claimed by the *Boot and Shoe Trades Journal* as the first with an island showcase. Curving inwards to leave space for a large island display window in the centre, its façade was set back from the frontage, with a passage four or five feet wide 'enabling the public to make a complete inspection of the first and second fronts without entering the shop' and without obstructing the pavement. In this way, the 40ft frontage could almost double its display area. The bent plate glass was reported to be the largest sheet ever made.⁵⁴

Hanan-Gingell, the 'American Shoe Store', sold American-made footwear for men and women: men's footwear on the ground floor, women's on the first floor. Photographs taken when the shop was new are evocative of a lost era of retailing but do not convey the colourfulness of the interior. The shopfittings and furniture were of mahogany, while the upholstery was in green Morocco leather with thick carpets in a terracotta colour and there were fine plaster ceilings. All this was set off by the shoeboxes, which covered the walls and were turquoise blue. In the early 1930s this was still a shoe shop – by then Hanan & Son Ltd – but had been joined at No. 332 by the Carr Shoe Company.