

Chapter 9

350–396 Oxford Street

Marylebone Lane to Duke Street

From Marylebone Lane westwards to Duke Street, Oxford Street's north side differed in early character from the frontage to its east and west, where the original layout of the land in broad blocks favoured the eventual growth of department stores occupying all or most of a sizeable island. Here another pattern obtained, of blocks seldom wider than 100 feet, separated by narrow lanes and fronting a ragged hinterland.

Freehold ownerships here were also mixed. The frontage between Nos 350 and 360 encompassed one of Marylebone's oldest settlements, whose history is more fully addressed in Volume 51 of the *Survey*. Between the two arms of Marylebone Lane stood the ancient parish church of Tyburn, abandoned as early as 1400, and then much later, the former parish court house, set well back from the main road. That triangular site marked the western edge of the extensive Cavendish-Harley, later Portland and finally Howard de Walden estate.

To its west lay a piece of land which had been leased by the City Corporation in the twelfth century in order to safeguard the water supply from the adjacent Tyburn or Ay brook. This land was held by the City along with a larger area to the south of Oxford Street centred on the present course of Bond Street, the whole being collectively known as the Conduit Mead estate. Set back behind the frontage on the smaller holding north of the highway was built in 1565 the so-called Banqueting House, a modest structure which City dignitaries used once a year as the base for their

inspection of the water course. The Corporation purchased the freehold of Conduit Mead in the early seventeenth century and kept it after the Banqueting House and associated conduits lost their function.

In the 1770s Stratford Place was developed on this northern ground under Edward Stratford, 2nd Earl of Aldborough. That once-elegant creation, also covered in Volume 51 of the *Survey*, was always an anomaly in the environs of Oxford Street, with two towering classical pavilions or wings fronting the main road and framing a cul de sac. These end pavilions, demolished in 1892 and 1916, were never numbered in Oxford Street, and the later adjustment of numbering to include these sites has caused some confusion. The elevation of the current building at No. 360 recalls the western pavilion in character but not in detail.

The City's freehold slightly overlapped the course of the Tyburn or Ay Brook, which ran along a line represented by the lost Stratford Place Mews west of Stratford Place itself, crossing Oxford Street approximately at the site of the present No. 362. The stream was culverted from the early eighteenth century, but continued to cause problems for later builders. Beyond the narrow Gee's Court, the frontage as far west as the middle of the modern Selfridges site belonged to the twenty-acre Great Conduit Field or Close, whose ownership can be traced back to the brewer-developer Joseph Girdle in the mid seventeenth century. This property was first developed in the 1760s and '70s. The small scale of original building here can be deduced from the proportions of Barrett Street, Bird Street, Gee's Court and the slightly more generous James Street.

The Marylebone Lane triangle

Nos 350–352. The present building on this triangular site between the two arms of Marylebone Lane is a block dating from 1935–6 housing shops, flats and a hotel. But it occupies the oldest site in Marylebone of which any record

remains, for here stood the mediaeval church of Tyburn before the creation of a new parish church near the top of Marylebone High Street in about 1400. An account of what little is known of that first church is given in *Survey of London*, Volume 51, under Marylebone Lane. All trace of it had gone by the time the parish court house (1729–30) was built at the back of the triangle, followed by the new court house to its north (1824–5). These parochial buildings were set well back from Oxford Street, leaving an open space towards the main road, probably occupied by the old parish pound. Three modest buildings were erected here at an unknown date, probably after 1750, and eventually numbered 158–160 (consec.) Oxford Street. They are clearly shown on the Horwood maps and on Tallis's street view. The Portland estate maps of c.1805 do not fully depict them, but record that No. 159 (old numbering) in the centre was then tenanted by James Ludlam, hosier, and No. 160 at the western corner by Richard Barnett, a minor painter and picture dealer.¹

These sites were later divided into two instead of three, and rebuilt with stone fronts following Portland (later Howard de Walden) Estate policy. The eastern corner, No. 350 (formerly 158 or 158A) came first. From the early 1850s until 1935 here were the premises of the well-known booksellers J. & E. Bumpus. The firm is traditionally stated to have begun in Clerkenwell about 1790, though no trace of the name appears in directories or newspapers of that date.² John Bumpus, bookseller, is listed in the Holborn area from around 1815; he overcame an insolvency only to drown himself in the Surrey Canal in 1832.³ His sons carried on in the trade, and around 1853 the second John Bumpus opened the Oxford Street branch, while his brother Edward stayed in Holborn. In due course a further shop was added just across the road at No. 297 (later 365). Shortly after the second John Bumpus died, his son John Barton Bumpus agreed to take a 60-year Portland rebuilding lease and reconstructed in 1881–2 to the designs of a local architect, Edmund Marks (G. H. & A. Bywaters, builders). The result was a neat corner building faced in Portland stone ashlar with a shop front of American walnut. The best books

were kept in glass-fronted cases on the ground and first floor, with second-hand books in the basement and the 'very large' general stock on upper floors (shown in Bedford Lemere photographs of 1894: Ills 9.3, 9.4) along with a counting house and private room. A lift and 'speaking-pipes' were among the conveniences.⁴

In 1920, two years after the death of J. B. Bumpus, the business became part of the growing empire of Debenhams Ltd, who by then owned both Marshall & Snelgrove to the east and No. 352 next west, and had just purchased the old vestry hall to the north, after St Marylebone Borough Council moved to its new town hall on Marylebone Road. Under the management of J. G. Wilson, Bumpus expanded northwards into the old municipal premises and there enjoyed a brief heyday. But when Debenhams redeveloped the whole island site in the mid 1930s, the Bumpus shop moved west to 477 Oxford Street.⁵

No. 352 Oxford Street, on the west corner of the island site (sometimes Nos 352–354), was from the mid 1870s briefly in the independent tenure of Jane Mason, couturier. When she fell into receivership in 1882, Marshall & Snelgrove took the opportunity to buy her out, keeping her name but managing the business themselves. The premises were rebuilt in 1904–5 to designs by George Hornblower, architect, with Hall, Beddall & Co., builders. Like No. 350 this new building was also stone-fronted, but in a more explicitly classical taste, with Adamesque pilasters and frieze adorning the upper storeys, and enriched shop windows extending up to the first floor. The shop went on after the rebuilding under the Jane Mason name.⁶ The fussiness of the upper shop windows was not to the liking of Jaeger Ltd, who took over most of the premises in 1923. Seven years later they brought in the proto-modernist Frederick Etchells, who had the first floor 'cleared right out' and installed large nickel-plated windows 'reaching from stanchion to stanchion'. Some of the interior finishes were in Plymax, in other words aluminium sheet bonded on to plywood. The *Architect and Building News* felt

this little dress shop ‘worth a visit for purpose of study and thought’.⁷ Aficionados would have had to hurry, because in 1935 the whole block was consigned to demolition.

That took place following a road-widening scheme agreed between Marylebone Borough Council and Debenhams, who now controlled the complete island site. The old buildings were demolished for the present ten-storey neo-Georgian block of 1935–6, designed by the architects Gunton & Gunton and built by Harry Neal Ltd. It originally comprised a Dolcis shoe store (350 Oxford Street) and service flats (Stratford Court, later made into a hotel); a lounge, club room and restaurant were provided roughly on the site of the old watch-house and court-house. The island site lost the top of the apex and a strip along the west side, but gained extra ground at the junction of Oxford Street and the eastern branch of Marylebone Lane. The most impressive aspect of the building was the Dolcis shop, occupying three floors, by Harry Simcock, architect. The first of several subsequent Dolcis stores in Oxford Street, it was designed with ambition. One of the first permanent canopies permitted in the street shaded the shop windows and was illustrated in *Vogue*. Inside, trading was on three floors; the main space boasted an open imperial staircase in the centre and galleries all round. The steel piers carrying the building’s upper floors were clad in ‘cellulosed mahogany’. Changes were made to the main showroom in 1951.⁸ At some point the freehold was sold to the Church Commissioners. After passing through various owners, the Stratford Court Hotel was purchased by Edwardian Hotels in 1982 and is now the Radisson Blu. The main entrance is on its east side from Marylebone Lane.

Marylebone Lane West to Gee’s Court

This stretch of frontage, covered in modern numbers by 354–366 Oxford Street, represents the breadth of the City Corporation’s Conduit Mead

freehold north of the main road. Until the middle of the eighteenth century, this land was undeveloped except for the small Banqueting House set back from the road. The Tyburn or Ay Brook ran along or near the western edge of the property. Between 1772 and 1793 it was built up under Lord Aldborough as Stratford Place, a formally planned cul de sac taking up most of the ground, with Stratford Place Mews covering the site of the culverted brook to its west.⁹

The two inward-facing wings of Stratford Place came forward to the road at the south end of the cul de sac, and were finished off elevationally as broad, blank pavilions with pilastered returns – a dignified interlude breaking up Oxford Street’s commercial monotony of shop front after shop front. Between the pavilions, two sentry boxes topped off with couched lions guarded the entrance to Stratford Place. The pavilions were at first occupied as private houses, entered from and numbered in Stratford Place (No. 1 on the east, No. 22 on the west). The first inhabitant of the eastern pavilion was the American-born radical Stephen Sayre, who also ran a short-lived bank (1773–5) from a lower extension at the back of the answering western pavilion – an address originally numbered 160 Oxford Street, and abutting west on Stratford Place Mews. Under a lease obtained from Lord Aldborough, Sayre also built two of the next three houses along Oxford Street west of the mews, at first Nos 161 and 162, beyond which came No. 163 at the corner of Gee’s Court; all these three buildings included shops from the start.

After Sayre was arrested on a trumped-up charge that he planned to kidnap George III, he left England and his Oxford Street properties came in 1780 into the hands of Thomas Garnet, mercer. The former bank at No. 160, which included rooms over the mews gateway, became a coffee house, at first called the Marylebone Coffee House, later the Stratford. Garnet was declared bankrupt in 1788.¹⁰ Nos 161 & 162 may have been rebuilt in 1814, when a new lease was issued to Thomas Scotland, a wine and spirit merchant in the City;¹¹ No. 162 became the Clarendon, later the Clarendon Stores. When Oxford

Street was renumbered in 1880, No. 160 at the back of Stratford Place became No. 358, Nos 161–163 became Nos 362–366, while the premises over the mews gateway acquired the number 360.¹²

The pavilion houses were inevitably affected by their exposed position, No. 1 becoming a club, No. 22 solicitor's offices with discreet shops at ground level. Eventually they succumbed to redevelopment, the east side in 1892 and the west in 1916. But the City Lands Committee stipulated that the replacement buildings should in some degree respect the character of the originals. No. 1 Stratford Place became a London & Westminster Bank, built in 1892–3 to designs by F. W. Hunt, sporting a four-storey stone front with high arched windows for the banking hall, surmounted by a giant order and crowned by a balconied attic.¹³ No. 22 on the answering corner was more faithfully replicated in 1919–21, under circumstances described below.

It remains to add that an elaborate marble drinking fountain was installed on the Oxford Street pavement in 1864, near the corner between the east end of 1 Stratford Place and Marylebone Lane West. Designed by Henry Burton (Decimus Burton's nephew) and executed by the carvers Purves & Norton, it was the gift of David Salomons, MP. It consisted of a circular basin of Sicilian marble supported on a pillar with sunk panels, and surmounted by an urn in *jaune fleuri* marble. It did not survive long into the twentieth century.¹⁴

354–358 Oxford Street

Attempts to retain a memory of the relation between Stratford Place and the end pavilions were finally abandoned when the National Westminster Bank decided in 1961 to rebuild No. 1 yet again, to designs by Richard Seifert & Partners. The scheme was carried out after some delay, and acquired the new address of 354–358 Oxford Street. The building was a fairly typical Seifert block, faced in pre-cast concrete panels, with the novelty of an upstairs

banking hall in order to release the ground floor for retail space.¹⁵ The freehold of the site was in the ownership of GE Pensions Ltd, until it was purchased c.2010, for reconstruction with a new ticket hall for Bond Street Station, as part of the planned Crossrail interchange. The upper portions of the building, designed by Fletcher Priest Architects in 2011 but still not built at the time of writing, will be brick-faced and contain retailing and residential space.¹⁶

360–366 Oxford Street

The present two buildings on these sites have an interrelated history. Though different in appearance, both date from during and just after the First World War. Until 1935 they were separated at ground level by a narrow entrance into Stratford Place Mews.

The façade of the eastern building, numbered 360 Oxford Street since about 1969, roughly replicates the appearance of the previous building on this site, the pilastered end pavilion of the western arm of Stratford Place. During the late nineteenth century it was in the possession of the Burgoyne family of solicitors, and housed discreet shops on the ground floor (though perhaps not shop fronts) with the Burgoyne's offices above; formerly 22 Stratford Place, it had been renumbered as 356–360 Oxford Street in the 1890s. The Burgoyne family also owned the next house north, 21 Stratford Place, where Montague Thomas Burgoyne and his wife Elizabeth lived. He died, intestate and heavily mortgaged, in 1913.¹⁷ Soon afterwards the Burgoyne family put forward a scheme for altering the two properties, to designs by F. W. Hunt. For the moment these plans came to nothing. But by then commercial firms may already have been interested in the family's premises, while negotiations were proceeding for a tall building on the next site west (see below) which would overshadow them at the back.¹⁸

Just before the outbreak of war in 1914 the shoemakers Lilley & Skinner signed an agreement with Elizabeth Burgoyne to buy up her lease.¹⁹ Based in Northampton and Pentonville, Lilley & Skinner already had numerous London shops and were eager to get into Oxford Street. Their regular architect, Arthur Sykes, produced designs for a complete rebuilding, with an elevation which made a clumsy effort at simulating the previous pilastered front in the upper storeys, over two levels of shop windows. This scheme was passed in March 1915 by the City Lands Committee on behalf of the City Corporation as freeholders and by the LCC but not immediately proceeded with, presumably because of the war.²⁰ A protest against the design was then organized by the Countess of Mayo and other influential Stratford Place residents, who involved the Society of Antiquaries. The City Lands Committee replied that their objections came too late, and the old buildings were duly demolished. However, presumably after private pressure, Lilley & Skinner consented to revise the design. Under a new agreement of 1917, Sykes produced fresh elevations copying the previous Adam-style front with its giant pilasters running through the first and second storeys more closely, only with six pilasters instead of four, as the new front was two bays wider. It was a case of shutting the stable door long after the horse had bolted, since the answering eastern pavilion of the ensemble had disappeared a generation earlier. Nevertheless it was to this design that Lilley & Skinner finally rebuilt in 1919–21, using George Bollom of Acton as builder. Under the specification, they had been obliged to preserve the capitals and mantelpieces from the old buildings for reuse, but it is improbable that the former were replaced, while the latter certainly were not.²¹

The greater length of the replica elevation plus the continuous shop front along the ground storey made the completed building look rather different from its predecessor, and indeed it came in for criticism.²² Nevertheless Sykes designed stone piers at the ends of the front and beneath the outermost of the six pilasters, and faithfully repeated the former facing on

the ground storey return towards Stratford Place. Here Lilley & Skinner fulfilled an undertaking by rehousing one of the previous tenants in a separate corner shop numbered 356 Oxford Street.²³ They themselves started off with limited accommodation numbered 358–360 Oxford Street, and featuring a little arcade of independent windows in front of the shop proper, so that shoes could be displayed in the round. The Burgoynes returned to occupy upper floors and most of 21 Stratford Place, also rebuilt in replica under the project. The new building was christened Cosway House in honour of the miniaturist Richard Cosway, who had lived in the previous building.

Soon Lilley & Skinner began acting like cuckoos in a cramped nest. In 1923 they expanded upwards in their own building, opening a children's department in the first floor, and northwards up Stratford Place, taking in No. 20.²⁴ Then in 1928 they resolved on breaking out of their straitjacket by employing an architect with more up-to-date tastes, Gordon Jeeves, to create a new and much larger building on the site next north, 17–19 Stratford Place. Designed with a vigorously Art Deco front, this seven-storey block paid no respect to the remains of the Stratford Place enclave, and undid the contextualizing efforts of Lilley & Skinner's previous building. At the back a lower extension partly bridged over Stratford Place Mews. This intrusive block was built after a delay in 1931–2, its Portland stone front somewhat toned down. The shoe firm occupied only the lower storeys, which included a showroom on axis with the Oxford Street shop, lit mainly by artificial lighting and panelled with Australian walnut and an ebony skirting. Jeeves also remodelled the Oxford Street front, recasting the independent showcases and arcade and mounting loud Art Deco lettering with the firm's name on the fascia above.²⁵

Under a fresh architect, Donald Hamilton, Lilley & Skinner embarked on yet further extensions from 1934 onwards. The most significant involved uniting their premises with the former Maison Lyons to the west (see below), eliminating most of Stratford Place Mews in the process. The junction

between the buildings was managed by inserting an extra bay in the style of the 1919–21 front over the former mews entrance and adding in a seventh pilaster to remedy the asymmetry. Lilley & Skinner sublet most of the upper space in Nos 362–366, but moved their children’s department to the ground floor and installed a restaurant on the second floor. At the other end of the front, they now also displaced the tenant of the corner shop at No. 356, paving the way for an eventual extension of their display windows round into Stratford Place and the dismantling of Sykes’s east-facing replica stonework at ground level.

In 1935 Hamilton himself moved into an office on the sixth floor of the united Oxford Street building, subsequently renamed Avon House. He went on in 1938–9 to add a small block of offices at the end of Gee’s Court, formally 24 and 25 Barrett Street. His firm, now Donald Hamilton, Wakeford & Partners continued to work for Lilley & Skinner for some years after the Second World War. But when in 1957 Lilley & Skinner merged with Saxone, the amalgamated company turned to the latter firm’s in-house designer, Michael Egan, to freshen up the shop fronts, which he did while retaining the independent windows and walkway. In 1966, when the united firm was part of Charles Clore’s British Shoe Corporation, the shop specialist Ellis O. Somake undertook a partial refurbishment of the Oxford Street store.²⁶ Lilley & Skinner disappeared in the 1980s.

The seven-storey building on the western part of this site, abutting west on the entry to Gee’s Court and formally numbered as 362–366 Oxford Street, still retains the original mini-skyscraper look of the ‘Maison Lyons’ opened here in 1916, though its lowest floors have been mutilated. The architects were Lewis Solomon & Son.

The history of the three previous houses here, squeezed between Gee’s Court on the west and the equally narrow Stratford Place Mews on the east, is given above. Behind, the site tapered back into various small tenements and stables. Rebuildings here began with a small block at the back, the modest 20

Stratford Place Mews of 1910. Then early in 1914 Percival Blow, an architect from St Albans, came forward with a scheme for the Oxford Street frontage on behalf of Otto Simon Ortweiler, lessee of No. 366, a manufacturer of fancy leather goods, principally ladies' handbags. This German-born Jew had naturalized in the 1890s but continued to rely for his trade on leather goods supplied from his native Offenbach. He could hardly have timed his initiative worse. When war broke out, his competitors denounced the hapless Ortweiler, although his sons volunteered for the nascent British air force. With courage and difficulty he just kept his business going and won modest damages in the courts for defamation.²⁷

Shortly before the declaration of hostilities, Ortweiler had been supplanted as developer for the site by the firm of J. Lyons & Co. The Lyons company had made rapid strides in opening places of refreshment in the West End since the foundation of their business in 1892. There were ten Lyons establishments in Oxford Street alone in 1910, mostly small teashops on the street's south side, but the management was bent on aggrandisement, chiefly by creating its large Corner House restaurants. For Oxford Street a slightly different type was decided on, to be called the Maison Lyons. In November 1912 a temporary establishment opened at 368 Oxford Street, the site next west on the other side of Gee's Court.²⁸

It was soon succeeded by the present building. Lyons & Co. were ready to proceed in July 1914, employing as architects Lewis Solomon and his son Digby Solomon – the firm's regular architect, W. J. Ansell, having recently died. The outbreak of war is enough to explain the delay before the opening two years later, but there was also difficulty with the foundations, as the piles of the deep basement had to avoid the culvert bearing the Ay or Tyburn brook immediately east of the site. Lyons' in-house building department carried out the main contract and was responsible for the details, submitting very full dossiers of the ventilation, heating and cooking arrangements to the London County Council, but the steelwork of the framed structure was

designed by the engineers Reade, Jackson & Perry and supplied and erected by Dorman Long & Co. As in the Corner Houses, the front was entirely faced in Doulton's gleaming and washable Carraraware, which also ran along the flanks to minimize obstruction of light to neighbouring properties, as can still be seen in Gee's Court. At the back, the new building overlapped parts of 20 Stratford Place Mews.²⁹

The Maison Lyons opened with some fanfare in September 1916, the company announcing that half the first day's takings would go towards the Star and Garter fund for a home for disabled servicemen. It also promised '*recherché* yet inexpensive fare amidst surroundings of artistic distinction and charm. "Corner House" Tariff and Prices. In the Confectionery Salon is the most up-to-date Soda Fountain supplying Iced Fruit and other special American drinks'.³⁰ The American trend is confirmed by a photograph of an imported band with banjo players and a saxophonist in one of the restaurants. These were three in number, one in the basement and one each on the first and second floors, accommodating between 750 and 1,000 customers. Each was decorated in different colours but conventional taste compared to the inter-war Lyons interiors. The ground floor, panelled in French walnut, housed a large open shop in front and an informal seated area behind with the bar or soda fountain. The service provisions at the back included a significant space for 'chocolate packing'. The upper storeys had a smoking room on the third floor, and service rooms for the staff plus a chocolate factory and storage at higher levels.³¹

The Maison Lyons enjoyed only a short life, closing when the last of the Corner Houses was opened in the Cumberland Hotel further west in 1933. As explained above, the building was then united with the premises of Lilley & Skinner next east. In 1951 the architects Donald Hamilton, Wakeford & Partners reconstructed the first floor of the war-damaged front in a regrettable neo-Georgian style to match those adjacent premises.³²

Gee's Court to Duke Street

These frontages lay historically on what was known in the seventeenth century as Great Conduit Close, which abutted east on the City's Conduit Mead estate and stretched west of the present Duke Street to approximately the centre of the Selfridges block. Before development this freehold was owned by Joseph Girle and his descendants. The first houses and shops were built here in the 1760s and '70s under a head lease to Thomas Barratt, brickmaker, whose descendants later bought the freehold, subsequently known as the Hope Edwards or Edwardes estate. All the original houses along the Oxford Street frontage have been reconstructed at one time or another, most in the twentieth century. No. 384 (previously 167) at the east corner with Bird Street was the Victory pub for most of the nineteenth century. In the same short block between James and Bird Streets, the old No. 165 (later 380) was between about 1848 and 1860 the West End showroom of the Commercial Plate Glass Company, which under an entrepreneur called Charles M'Lean made glass of exceptional size for mirrors and shop fronts, shown at the Great Exhibition. The company's main depot was in Fleet Street.³³

Gee's Court today marks the entrance to the St Christopher's Place area, a district transformed from shabbiness into trendiness from the late 1960s onwards, chiefly under the developer Robin Spiro. It is dominated by a plethora of boutiques and eateries, different in character from the Oxford Street frontage. In 2012 a two-metre nude female figure holding a ball was erected over the narrow entrance to Gee's Court with the aim of alluring shoppers up the passage. Named 'The Spirit of St Christopher', it is made of many sparkling pieces of mirror glass in mosaic and was designed by Paul Dart of James Glancy Design.³⁴

Nos 368–374. The short block between Gee’s Court and James Street appears to have been entirely rebuilt in 1902–3 to designs by Willey & Gale, architects. The style is commercial Queen Anne, in red brick with copious stone dressings. The Oxford Street frontage has flattened bays and shaped gables above the shops, while a slightly simpler elevation obtains towards James Street; there is a corner tourelle.³⁵ Nos 368–370 at the east end of the block were always one address; around 1937 this end was refronted in cinematic faience, with showy Art Deco metalwork to the upper windows, which has earned the building a Grade II listing. The occupant immediately thereafter was a costumier, Peter Bradley.³⁶ No. 374 was for some years after the Second World War the home of Swears & Wells, self-proclaimed as ‘the world’s largest fur shop’.

Nos 376–384, occupying a compact block between James Street and Bird Street, is one of Oxford Street’s plainest buildings, a dour seven-storey affair stretching back to Barrett Street, built for C & A Modes in 1959.

The previous buildings on the site dated from 1904–5, when the frontage was rebuilt by F. & H. F. Higgs with a stone-faced block in late Queen Anne style to designs by the prolific Augustus E. Hughes & Son on behalf of D. C. Apperly, a Gloucestershire-born wool merchant who had built up a wholesale business in the City.³⁷

In May 1906 the whole block became the home of the Times Book Club, founded the previous year. Part bookshop and part lending library, this institution was the brainchild of the dynamic American advertising manager of *The Times* and proprietor of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Horace Hooper, and had been eagerly taken up by the paper’s managing director, Charles Moberly Bell, as a way of reviving its financial fortunes. The idea was to offer a wide selection of approved books *en masse* to subscribers to *The Times*, either on loan or to buy at keen prices, and then to sell off the loaned copies after several months at a heavy discount. Intensively advertised in the paper’s

columns, the Times Book Club opened in a 'fine suite of rooms' at 93 New Bond Street in September 1905. It proved an instant success: 'the building was crowded from morning till night'.³⁸

With Bell's support, Hooper now arranged to expand the enterprise enormously and take the whole of 376–384 Oxford Street, employing such motivated and intellectual staff as Janet Hogarth and Oswald Sickert, the painter's brother. The premises were acquired from Apperly on a 35-year lease by the Walter family, then still owners of *The Times*, the steep price of £75,000 being found by means of a mortgage in favour of Lord Rothschild.³⁹ The transfer was puffed with a fresh booklet promoting the scheme, and a big sale advertised as 'the greatest sale of books that had ever been held', open not just to subscribers but to the general public, and offering a stock of 600,000 books officially priced at £222,000 for less than £25,000. On the opening day,

the building was so besieged by crowds of buyers that the doors had to be closed ... Soon after 10 o'clock in the morning Oxford Street was blocked, and it was apparent that only a small proportion of those who had come could enter the building at all. The doors were accordingly closed, and were only again opened, at intervals of an hour, for two or three minutes at a time.⁴⁰

The sale lasted three days; according to Janet Hogarth, 'Books vanished like magic; we had to rush in fresh supplies; library subscribers, fighting their way in through side-doors to change their books, stood amazed and remained amused to watch the surging multitudes'.⁴¹

These events provoked the enmity of the influential Publishers' Association, already suspicious of the initiative because of the radical discounting of book prices. The so-called Book War followed, when publishers refused to supply the club by normal channels or to offer *The Times* review copies of new books. This continued until Lord Northcliffe purchased the newspaper and its associated enterprises early in 1908 and made peace

with the Publishers' Association, agreeing to observe a revised Net Book Agreement. Though popular, the Book Club was making large losses which Northcliffe determined to stem. The enterprise was hived off from the Times Publishing Company in the form of a new, semi-independent Times Book Company. Hooper now withdrew in favour of Northcliffe's man of business, Kennedy Jones, who introduced blue uniforms and 'suburban susceptibilities' to replace the Book Club's initial 'general gaiety and free-and-easiness'. Hogarth and Sickert now escaped to the offices of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in High Holborn. Under the new régime the library side of the scheme was downgraded and pushed upstairs, while the ground floor became more like an orthodox bookshop, somewhat reduced in size, No. 376 at the James Street corner becoming a draper's shop in 1914.⁴²

Nevertheless the purchase of prime Oxford Street property had proved a good investment, as the managers of *The Times* came to appreciate. When the lease was put up for sale in 1922, it realized a cool £130,000 and was quickly sold on at a further profit.⁴³ The club and bookshop moved away to Wigmore Street. They were replaced by another unusual organization, C & A Modes. This was the first British store of the Dutch-German firm gradually built up by Clemens and August Brenninkmeyer in the nineteenth century. The firm's move into Britain took place without publicity under the second Clemens Brenninkmeijer (as the family spelt itself when its base moved to the Netherlands).

C & A thrived on anonymity, but specialized at the outset in outerwear for ladies, maids and girls before expanding into women's wear generally, relying for custom on its competitive pricing policies. Nos 376–384 underwent several phases of alteration, always under the direction of the architects North, Robin & Wilsdon. In the first phase the shop windows facing Oxford Street were taken round the corners into Bird and James Streets; retailing reached up to the second floor, above which were a mail order department, work rooms and stock rooms. In 1927–8 the premises were lengthened

northwards as far as Barrett Street, allowing the showrooms to be extended, though parts were sublet to Cellophane Ltd. In 1934 another round of internal changes followed on. These must soon have been deemed inadequate, as from 1936 onwards North, Robin & Wilsdon submitted a series of plans for complete rebuilding, concentrating the accommodation into taller pavilions at the front, centre and back connected by lower link blocks so as to maximize light on the enclosed site. The ground storey facing Oxford Street was to be taken up by a sequence of display cases and internal walkways stretching backwards to half the depth of the block in front of the showroom proper.⁴⁴

This reconstruction stalled, largely because in 1938 C & A took the centre block of Hereford (then British Industries) House on the opposite side of Oxford Street and transferred their main offices thither. Serious bomb damage to this block caused the firm to erect a temporary store in front. C & A finally rebuilt Nos 376–384 in 1959 under North & Partners of Maidenhead (as the architects had now become); Rush & Tompkins were the contractors.⁴⁵ The scheme roughly followed the layout suggested in the 1930s, but the plain concrete elevations were entirely of their day. After reopening their shop here, C & A for some years had three separate Oxford Street outlets, at Nos 200–212, 376–384 and 500–15.⁴⁶ The lower storeys of the front are at the time of writing covered up with large advertisements for GAP, the present retailers on the site.

No. 386, at the west corner with Bird Street, is an isolated Edwardian survival amidst lumpen post-war blocks in this sector of Oxford Street. Like the lost Nos 376–384, it was built speculatively for D. C. Apperly by Higgs & Hill to designs by Augustus E. Hughes & Son but a year or two later, in 1907. It is a pert little building, stone-faced, with a stringy turret at the corner.⁴⁷

The rest of this block is now filled with a seven-storey building of blank character covering **Nos 388–396**, built in 1958–9 for Willson's (London & Provinces Ltd) by Gee, Walker & Slater to designs by W. H. Hattrell &

Partners and then sold to the property firm Hide & Co. Ltd.⁴⁸ Extending northwards to cover 41–53 Duke Street, it appears to have been reclad. The previous buildings here included Penberthy's, a fashionable draper's, established at No. 390 in 1883 and gradually enlarged to fill Nos 388–396 behind a ragbag of fronts, mostly stuccoed. Frederick Penberthy, London-born but the descendant of a staunch Wesleyan family from Helston, Cornwall, had learnt his trade with Swan & Edgar and then built up a glove and hosiery business 'entirely by his own ability and enterprise', said *The Times* when he died in 1929. Alison Adburgham cites a description of him as a 'British and Foreign Laceman, Court Glover, English Hosier, and Importer of Viennese and Paris Fans'. The firm's inter-war expansion included the take-over of Nos 394 and 396 at the corner with Duke Street, which had been rebuilt to designs by C. W. Stephens in 1913 (builders, Bovis Ltd) and was first occupied by a branch of the hat shop Maison Louise. Penberthy's moved to 187–193 Oxford Street when the rebuilding of 1958–9 took place, and survived into the 1980s.⁴⁹