

## Chapter 10

### 398–454 Oxford Street

### Duke Street to Orchard Street

The lengthy block between Duke Street and Orchard Street is wholly identified today with the commanding presence of Selfridges, grandest of Oxford Street's shops. A summary of the buildings previously on these sites precedes a fuller account of the great store's convoluted origins and growth.

#### *Early development*

It is sometimes stated that Selfridges was built entirely on Portman estate land, but that is not the case. Like the blocks next east between Gee's Court and Duke Street, the frontage immediately west of Duke Street covering the original Nos 173–184 Oxford Street (later 1880 Nos 398–426) belonged to the freehold formerly known as Great Conduit Close or Field, and it was here that the original portion of Selfridges was raised. Brief details of this landholding are given in Chapter 9. In 1740 a long lease of this whole ground was issued to Thomas Barratt, brickmaker. But little or no development seems to have taken place west of Duke Street until the early 1760s, when Joseph Saunders, carpenter, took a building sublease from Barratt.<sup>1</sup> The freehold ownership of Great Conduit Field continued to be split between several different families until 1830, when a partition award made by the local surveyor Simeon Thomas Bull divided it between several heirs.<sup>2</sup> In due course the whole freehold became generally known as the Hope-Edwardes estate, after the names of Barratt's descendants, to whom it eventually passed.

Further west, between Nos 185 and 197 at the Orchard Street corner (after 1880 Nos 428–454), the freehold in the mid eighteenth century belonged to Henry Portman and was developed under a long lease granted to William Baker in 1756. The first building took place here between about 1760 and 1763.<sup>3</sup>

At first most of these houses were largely in domestic use. Some had gardens, but Horwood's map shows two large stable yards behind, reached from entries between Nos 180–181 and 190–191. Corner pubs emerged at these points: these were the Princess Amelia, subsequently the Oxford Stores, at No. 181 (later 418), and the Union at No. 191 (later 442), at the entry to Union Mews. There was probably also a pub from the start at the Duke Street corner (No. 173, later 398). This was the King and Queen in the eighteenth century, but in the nineteenth became the Hope Arms. It was rebuilt in 1870.<sup>4</sup>

Not long after the 1770 resurfacing of Oxford Street improved access to this western end of the road, tradesmen began to take over, starting with Thomas Gillow and William Taylor at No. 176 near the Duke Street corner (see below) and two booksellers, James Kerby, Kirby or Kirkby at No. 190 and Humanitas Jackson at No. 195. By the 1820s the frontage was largely commercial. New long leases were issued around that time on both the Portman and the Hope Edwardes properties. One of the lessees was Edward Wyatt, the eminent carver and gilder; his main base was the former 360 Oxford Street next to the Pantheon, but he seems to have had an existing interest in No. 192, where the occupant in the early 1790s was George Wyatt, wireworker. Edward Wyatt bought a long lease of No. 196 (later 452) near the Orchard Street corner in 1825, on behalf of two of his sons, the younger Edward Wyatt, also a carver, and Henry John Wyatt, architect.<sup>5</sup>

Tallis's street views give a sense of this block's appearance around 1839, when the houses nearly all had shop fronts and were fairly uniform in height. Gillows' premises at No. 176 (later No. 406) were the grandest, five windows wide and perhaps already cement-fronted, as they certainly were

later in the century. By the Edwardian period, just before and after the transformation wrought by Selfridges at the block's eastern end in 1908-9, further houses had been stuccoed and given basic window dressings, perhaps by the drapers T. Lloyd & Co., for whom also see more below. The Gillows premises apart, there had been few significant reconstructions along the block, the exception being Nos 430-432 towards the centre, which were rebuilt to modern commercial scale in about 1900.

### *Gillow & Company*

The London branch of the famous furniture-makers Gillow & Company occupied part of the present Selfridges site from 1769 to 1906. Throughout the firm's independent existence its headquarters was in Lancaster, where the first Robert Gillow founded a cabinet-making business around 1728. The London branch was started in 1769 by a cousin, Thomas Gillow, in partnership with William Taylor, another Lancaster cabinet-maker, though Thomas's brother James had previously worked in London for a time.<sup>6</sup> It is striking that the partners should have set up at an address as remote as 176 Oxford Street, just beyond Duke Street, then at the western limits of London's development and well beyond the centre of the upholstery trades. But early advertisements show they were trading also as estate agents, as cabinet-makers and upholsterers commonly did, even though their establishment was described as Gillow's and Taylor's 'Billiard Table Warehouse'.<sup>7</sup>

Both the London partners died prematurely, William Taylor in 1775 and Thomas Gillow in 1779. Thereafter the London branch remained closely linked with the Lancaster headquarters, co-ordinated first by the second Robert Gillow and then by his nephew, the third Richard Gillow. More is known about the activities and output of Lancaster than of London, but the latter was never just an office generating fashionable orders for the Lancashire craftsmen. From 1793 the Gillows had additional workshops in Providence

Court behind the handsome house 12 North Audley Street, south of Oxford Street, which they owned.<sup>8</sup>

In August 1813 the Providence Court manufactory burnt down. That same year the Gillows sold their interests to a consortium of cabinet-makers who had come up through the Lancaster workshops, Redmayne, Whiteside & Ferguson. The partner most associated with the London branch was W. J. Ferguson, and occasionally the business was called Ferguson, Whiteside & Co.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless the Gillows name and reputation were maintained. Despite the firm's national reach, study of a surviving account book for the years 1844-6 shows that 68.5% of the London showroom's transactions were for London customers.<sup>10</sup> By then Gillows were presenting themselves in directories as 'merchants and upholders'.

At an unknown date, perhaps in 1841, the five-bay premises were reconstructed and given a severe cement façade to designs by Thomas Little.<sup>11</sup> The estate agency continued to be an important arm of the Gillows firm, while the upholsterers were eventually recast as an interior decorating service (head designer Mr Henry) under the management of Thomas B. Clarke. The main office continued at No. 176 and in due course 177 Oxford Street (after 1880 Nos 406 & 408), but over time subsidiary premises were amassed both along the front (e.g. Nos 420 & 422) and in the back streets and mews. The owners of the London firm between the 1870s and 1890s were named as James Moon (the son of an apprentice of Leonard Redmayne) and Samuel James Harris.<sup>12</sup>

In 1897 the whole Gillows business, in Lancaster and London alike, was sold to the entrepreneurial Samuel Waring junior of the Liverpool firm S. J. Waring & Sons, which had recently established a London branch at 181 Oxford Street, east of Oxford Circus. That same year Waring also acquired T. J. Bontor & Company of Bond Street and Collinson & Lock of 76-80 Oxford Street, the amalgamated businesses becoming Waring & Gillow. He quickly capitalized on his acquisition by buying up neighbouring premises at 410-414 Oxford Street, where the leaseholder, Edwin Hewitt, draper, had gone

bankrupt while in the process of rebuilding, after fifty years of occupancy.<sup>13</sup> Hewitt's unfinished buildings had been picked up in a bankruptcy sale by John Musker, who had sold out his half-share in Home and Colonial Stores and was probably looking for safe investments. Waring now pulled down the half-finished buildings and erected four-storey premises for the amalgamated firm, seemingly paying off Musker with shares in the new company.<sup>14</sup> This was not the last to be heard of Musker. Meanwhile Waring had also sold off the old Bontors premises in Bond Street for a bank extension and moved the Bontors staff, mainly carpet salesmen and craftsmen, up to the Gillows site, thus enlarged.<sup>15</sup>

So for the time being the Gillows site looked secure. That seemed confirmed when in 1901 'very extensive new showrooms' were opened at 406 Oxford Street, then still under the management of T. B. Clarke, to house the repatriated interiors of the British Pavilion, a historicist confection created for the Paris Exhibition of 1900 by Waring & Gillow under the loose supervision of Lutyens.<sup>16</sup> But in the same year Waring began contemplating his mammoth store at 164–182 Oxford Street, destined to house all his central London enterprises including the cabinet-makers and salesmen of Gillows. As that undertaking neared completion, the future of the Gillows site began to occupy Waring's restless mind. An entire newcomer to the West End now entered into the story in the person of Gordon Selfridge.

## **Selfridges**

The charismatic personality and energy of Harry Gordon Selfridge have been the focus of several books, and it is upon these that previous historical accounts of the store he founded have largely relied.<sup>17</sup> The present study concentrates on the complicated story of Selfridges' architecture, which has been less well elicited. But it also corrects certain widely held assumptions

about the firm's foundation, which Selfridge himself seems to have taken pains to hide or forget. The concentration here is on the original building erected in Oxford Street between 1907 and 1928. Extensions further north are more briefly treated at the end of the chapter.

### *Selfridge & Waring Ltd*

Harry G. Selfridge, as he had hitherto called himself, arrived in London from Chicago in May 1906. Forty-eight years of age and unknown in England, he came with the express intention of founding a great department store on the lines of the Marshall Field Store in Chicago, where he had risen from a lowly position to that of junior partner and the dynamic head of retailing, before retiring abruptly in 1904 after 24 years of service. The aging Marshall Field's reluctance to take Selfridge into equal partnership and go along with his expansion plans was the decisive factor in the break. A curious episode followed, whereby Selfridge within a few months first bought and then sold the Schlesinger & Mayer Store, a Chicago neighbour and rival of Marshall Field's. In 1905 he was free again, with some limited fortune at his disposal. That summer he took an extended tour of Europe, partly as a family holiday with his wife and children, but partly (as it seems) to enquire into the possibilities of inaugurating a store in London.

So much is well-known. But the circumstances which enticed Selfridge to London are not generally appreciated, because it suited him in retrospect to draw a veil over them and present his decision to open a store in London as entirely his own, or influenced only by a chance suggestion from a fellow tycoon, W. H. Cottingham. That story is a garbled one, and like many connected with Selfridge need not be taken at face-value.<sup>1</sup> The truth appears

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Horace Cottingham (1866-1930) was the head of the Canadian branch of the Sherwin-Williams Paint Company before coming to live in Britain after Sherwin-Williams took over Berger

to be that Selfridge in the first place was wooed, no doubt very willingly, to come to Britain by the businessman Samuel J. Waring junior, then in the most expansive phase of his chequered career. While an explanation of Waring & Gillow's presence and activities on the future Selfridges site since 1897 is given above, a fuller account of Waring's rise and of his store's development at the other end of Oxford Street may be found on pages xxx. Suffice it here to say that plans for the new Waring & Gillow premises, the grandest store yet built on Oxford Street, had been evolving since 1901. After long negotiation it started on site in 1904, constructed by a newly founded Anglo-American contracting firm, the Waring-White Building Company, to designs by Waring's architect, R. F. Atkinson, and was to open in 1906.

Part of Waring's plan was to decant into this new store the workforce of the old-established Gillows furniture firm, whose purchase in 1897 had given rise to the name of Waring & Gillow. With boundless ambition, Waring now determined to fill the large and valuable vacancy thus created at that end of the Oxford Street frontage with a second store. So much emerges from a memorandum he prepared in February 1905 for a maiden visit to America.<sup>18</sup> The overall purpose of this three-month trip was to expand his business internationally, notably by financing the acquisition and construction of hotels. But first among eight separate objectives listed on the memorandum came the 'Gillow site', with the following comments: 'Stores Proprietors. Financier for Wertheimer. Opportunity for erecting a unique Oxford St. block.' The implication appears to be that Waring was exploring the chances of an alliance with the Bond Street art dealer Asher Wertheimer for a shop or gallery on the Gillows site.

Another page on the memorandum is headed: 'Object in Going to America. 1. To get ideas for new building.' Although this might refer to the

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Paints. The story is first found in Williams, pp. 80-1, where Cottingham is erroneously called a Chicago paint millionaire. Pound (p. 32) repeats this, while Honeycombe (p. 29) misnames him as Sherwin Cottingham.

Waring & Gillow building, then in construction, its general arrangements would have been settled by then, so it is more likely that Waring's enquiry was into 'ideas' for the second store. A series of influential American names to contact follows, including Wanamaker, the Philadelphia store magnate, and Stanford White, the architect, all on the East Coast of the United States; there is no mention of any Chicagoans such as Marshall Field or Selfridge. Yet there is one suggestive link. Among a further list of miscellaneous useful names, some English, others American, are Delissa Joseph, a City-based architect with a wide range of business contacts; and 'Hotels Organization known to H. J. Joseph'. The significance of the name lies in the fact that according to another of Selfridge's own stories, it was 'a very alert Jew' called Josephs who had written to him while he was still in Chicago tipping him off about a 'wonderful opening' at the 'dead end' of Oxford Street, and suggesting that Waring might help him to secure it financially. Hence, according to that version of events, the formation of the Selfridge & Waring Ltd partnership in June 1906 - the month that the Waring & Gillow store opened.<sup>19</sup>

The hypothesis that Waring sought out Selfridge in the first place, not the other way round, is hard to resist. Whether the two men met in the United States during the early part of 1905 cannot be ascertained, but they must surely have done so when Selfridge made his exploratory trip to Europe later that year. When he again sailed to London, this time with his mother in May 1906, the next name on the passenger list was, suggestively, a Maud Waring, travelling without relatives and aged 32.<sup>20</sup> Once the arrangement with Waring had been finalized, Selfridge straight away returned to the United States and brought back his family that June. They were first installed partly at a flat in Whitehall Court, but partly also at Waring's suburban seat, Foot's Cray Place, hinting at an initial ease and intimacy between the two tycoons.<sup>21</sup> Selfridge also found himself a temporary office base at 415 Oxford Street, opposite the intended new shop, which was at first to be called the Selfridge-Waring Store, London.<sup>22</sup>



Selfridge & Waring Ltd was to be a short-lived arrangement. The partners started off with a theoretically equal commitment. But while Waring had wide contacts and local knowledge, he had an extensive existing empire to run, whereas Selfridge had burnt his boats and could focus on the new venture alone. Both men possessed drive and persistence, but Selfridge had the extra gift of charisma. However the decisive issue was money. No sooner had the new Waring & Gillow opened (with Selfridge enrolled as a director) than rumours began circulating that Waring had overreached himself financially because of his megalomaniacal building ambitions – the same fate as was eventually to dog Selfridge. Though he fought off his creditors for three years, Waring’s difficulties meant that he was unable to raise his side of the capital for the new company. In these circumstances the project became in effect Selfridge’s alone, when after several months’ difficulty in the winter of 1907–8 John Musker was persuaded to advance the missing capital while remaining a sleeping partner only. Once again Selfridge later suggested that Musker’s involvement came about solely through his initiative.<sup>23</sup> That cannot be correct, for Musker had had a financial stake in the site since 1897, long before Selfridge’s advent, and was a shareholder in Waring & Gillow.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, having made a fortune in the 1880s along with Julius Drewe in founding Home and Colonial Stores, Musker had sold up and retired early to Norfolk to run a stud. His interest in Selfridge & Co. Ltd, the new company formed in March 1908, was represented by his son Harold.

Waring’s contribution to the origins of Selfridges was not confined to luring the American over and offering him a site. He was also involved in the protracted negotiations of official permissions for the architecture of the new store. That complicated business must next be addressed.

### *The first plans*

During Selfridge’s long years with Marshall Field, that vast emporium had been several times extended, notably by D. H. Burnham & Co., the pre-

eminent Chicago architects, who counted department stores among their specialities. Marshall Field's North State Street extension of 1902 in particular represented the latest step in rational, modern store design, steel-framed, with open-plan floors, plunging multi-storey light wells, but few decorative frills inside or out.<sup>25</sup> Selfridge was always interested in architecture, and though there is no hint of a close friendship between him and the equally charismatic Burnham, he was clearly in touch with the firm. One glance at the original but curious plans for Waring & Gillow would have been enough to convince him that he could do better. So the story that he arrived in London with a design or at least an internal layout for his store, devised by himself and drawn up by the Burnham firm, is plausible enough. Yet Selfridge would have known that local regulations had a big influence on the plan and construction of large buildings, and would have heard from Waring of the intricate negotiations which the latter's architect, R. Frank Atkinson, had had to conduct with the London County Council before Waring & Gillow could be finalized and built.

Official circles first heard of the Selfridge & Waring project in July 1906, just two months after the former's arrival, when D. H. Burnham & Co. submitted 'new plans' to the LCC, suggesting that earlier ones had been at least sketched out.<sup>26</sup> At this stage only plans and sections were in question. The application was by way of testing the ground, since the design severely challenged existing regulations on cubic capacity for buildings of the 'warehouse class' by showing a building divided into three sections, each greatly exceeding the maximum allowable 250,000 cubic feet under the London Building Act of 1894. Lawyers had evidently been consulted, for in order to circumvent the regulations on capacity the applicants asked the LCC to consider the building as a 'domestic' one, not one of the 'warehouse class'. By so doing they exposed some poor drafting in the 1894 Act, which failed to clarify the precise meaning of the two terms.

For want of surviving drawings the extent of this first design is difficult to determine. There were several layers of sub-basement,

subsequently discarded, and perhaps two extra storeys in the roof over and above those later built. But with a maximum of seven storeys above ground, the design was decidedly not an American skyscraper – for which London showed no signs of appetite at this time. The site applied to be built on consisted of just the former Gillows premises, in other words a restricted area covering most of the south-east corner of the present front block of Selfridges, bounded by Oxford Street, Duke Street and Somerset Street, but probably excluding the actual corner site with Duke Street (Nos 398–404). Nevertheless the ambition to fill the whole block as far west as Orchard Street may already have been present in Selfridge’s mind.

This application faced the LCC’s experienced Building Act Committee with some difficulty. Far from being the first request to exceed cubic capacity, the LCC Architect reported that there had been 122 such cases since 1894. Over half had been granted exemptions, since the Council was entitled to do so as long as the capacity of a given section of a building of the warehouse class did not exceed 450,000 cubic feet, as this design did, in which case exemptions were not legally permissible. The applicants advanced two lines of argument to get round this. One was that the floors of the building ought to be construed as party walls, since they would be of fireproof construction, but that was a non-starter under the 1894 Act. The other was to define the building as ‘domestic’.

The Committee was not unsympathetic to the application, or to updating the London building regulations in respect of cubical extent and means of construction; indeed it was wrestling with a similar application from D. H. Evans further along Oxford Street at the same time. But it was obliged to construe the law as it found it, after due consultation with colleagues and council officials. That took time. Having received contradictory opinions from barristers, the LCC Solicitor advised cautiously that the building would have to be treated as of the warehouse class. The Chief Officer of the Fire Brigade and his Committee were adamant that the regulations should not be relaxed,

on the grounds that London's good safety record for fires depended on strict divisions between and within buildings, and pointed to a recent fire in a Walworth Road drapery as proof that shops of this nature needed careful policing. The LCC Architect was for going ahead, but only if the applicants would undertake to install sprinklers, maintain fire-fighting equipment and staff, and fulfil some other conditions.

A revised application of September 1906 by Burnham's firm offered most of these guarantees and reduced the numbers of storeys both below and above ground. This, plus a rarely permitted personal appearance at the Building Act Committee on two occasions by Waring, who presumably claimed to know the ropes in these matters, tipped the balance. In April 1907 the Committee finally agreed to recommend the scheme to the full Council, on the expectation that the District Surveyor, Arthur Ashbridge, would raise an objection, the case would then go to the magistrates and thus be tested and decided in law. In the event that route, with its promise of further delays, was avoided and a compromise solution adopted. The full Council refused the application in May 1907,<sup>27</sup> but Selfridge & Waring now brought in Waring's architect Frank Atkinson to make changes to the plans. The main effect was to redivide the interior of the building by means of partition walls into four sections, not three, none of which exceeded 450,000 cubic feet. That allowed the LCC legally to grant the cubic capacity exemption. It formally did so on 2 July 1907.<sup>28</sup> After a full year of negotiation the building could start.

### *The design of the front*

The first drawings for Selfridges will have emanated from the design division of D. H. Burnham & Co. in Chicago. We do not certainly know who designed them, but the likeliest candidate is Ernest Graham, then Burnham's right-hand man. Almost all documentation of the relation between Selfridge and the Burnham firm is missing, but there is a single survival – a letter from

Graham to Selfridge of February 1908 on the topic of certain details connected with the new building. This reveals an intimacy between the two men going back to Selfridge's time at Marshall Field and a shared knowledge of details for the Chicago building. On that basis it seems safe to attribute a major role in the London project to Graham.<sup>29</sup>

As to what these first drawings looked like, according to Francis Swales, soon to be involved, they showed 'a plain commercial building similar to the Field Store in Chicago'. There followed 'a later design' which Swales said was inspired by Léon Ginain's extensions to the Ecole de Médecine at the Sorbonne in Paris and pronounced 'quite the most admirable study for a store building that the writer has seen'.<sup>30</sup> The main street front to the Ginain building includes a line of attached giant columns running through the upper storeys, so that motif was presumably present in the revised design. It may be inferred that something of the kind was requested by Selfridge himself, bent on making a splash in his London début by investing in a classical grandeur hitherto absent from department store architecture on either side of the Atlantic. Exuberance in French and American shop design had previously been marked by enrichment, not monumentality. Swales seems to have assumed that this second design came from the hand of Burnham himself, but he was never fully in the firm's confidence or on its payroll; again, the likelier author is Ernest Graham.<sup>31</sup>

There are two versions of the story as to how this design was transformed into something even grander – arguably Edwardian London's most sophisticated exercise in orthodox classicism. According to Selfridge, looking back in 1935, a young artist called Swales drifted into his office looking for work, roughed out a sketch 'on Greek lines' at Selfridge's suggestion, and then came back a day or two later with a complete drawing of the front with a four-tiered tower rising above. This captivated the latter completely and was therefore sent on to Burnham 'who approved it as a

practicable embellishment of his client's original conception'. Waring on the other hand, according to the anecdote, disapproved of this development.<sup>32</sup>

Francis Swales's own account of the matter was written closer to the events, in an article of 1909 reviewing the influence of Beaux-Arts architecture in England for the American journal *Architectural Record*.<sup>33</sup> Though more reliable, it is not wholly explicit. It passes over how he came to meet Selfridge, but it cannot have been by chance. Swales was a Canadian-born architect, but with English connections, since he was a first cousin once removed of the sculptor Alfred Gilbert. He had attended the Ecole des Beaux-Arts where he studied in the Pascal atelier and won prizes, then worked briefly in Chicago and St Louis before coming to London in 1903.<sup>34</sup> There he found employment with the Waring-White Building Company, the firm newly set up under the direction of another Chicagoan, R. A. Denell, which among other important London contracts had built the Ritz Hotel and Waring & Gillow and was shortly to tackle Selfridges. Swales's story was that Selfridge employed him to give the Ginain-inspired design 'the French touch' – a curious explanation, since the elevation was evidently 'French' already, and the final outcome less explicitly so than the few contemporary London buildings Swales admired, such as Mewès & Davis's Morning Post and Ritz. The clue may be Selfridge's understanding of 'the French touch'. By that Swales said he referred to two Chicago buildings, the World's Columbian Exposition Building of 1893 and the recent Cook County Court House, the approved version of which (designed by Holabird & Roche in 1905) again featured a massive monumental order through upper storeys on a plainer base.

There is one further possible source for the composition of the Selfridges front. An article published in *The Times* when the store opened and bearing tokens of inside information, remarked that it was inspired by 'the old Custom House' of Rome. That is a reference to what is now normally known as the Temple of Hadrian, a monumental street front in the Campo Marzio with eleven Corinthian columns running through three storeys, here

descending to ground level. A Piranesi view calls this building the Dogana, and it may be that Swales was shown such a drawing by Selfridge, a collector of architectural books and designs.<sup>35</sup>

As for the detail of the order used for the Selfridges elevation, an enriched version of Ionic, not Corinthian, it is clear enough that Swales sedulously copied Deglane's monumental front of the Grand Palais in Paris (1897–1900), which features exactly the same cabled fluting in the lower portions of the columns, enriched as bundles of tall fasces breaking into leaf, and the same graceful festoons dropping from the volutes of the capitals. Such motifs have their ancestry in earlier uses of the orders in French classicism, usually in sumptuous interiors, but the Grand Palais gave them fresh currency.

Swales was paid a one-off fee of £29 for his work on the design by Selfridge & Waring Ltd in November 1906, well before the plans for the store had been finalized, and had no more to do with the project. Though he was in contact with Burnham both before and after the Selfridges episode, he never worked for the Burnham firm directly. He continued as a freelance architect in London for the next few years, based in Bedford Park, before recrossing the Atlantic in 1911. During his London years he enjoyed some success as a lively architectural journalist, writing about American architecture for British journals and British (mainly London) and French architecture for American journals.

Among these articles was a flattering profile of Burnham, which touched the latter more than he had expected, so he told Swales in a letter. The piece included an image labelled 'the original design for the Selfridge store'.<sup>36</sup> A similar view was published in the *Building News* in November 1907.<sup>37</sup> Both derived from a watercolour by Lawrence Buck, an independent Chicago architect and painter no doubt commissioned by Burnham or Selfridge, and shown at the Royal Academy in 1907. On the face of it, 'original' should mean either the second Burnham (or Graham) design, or that

design as amended by Swales. But in fact it seems to show the final design, with further alterations made after Atkinson took over the scheme in 1907 in order to placate the LCC, apart from the exception of the two set-back storeys above the cornice, shown on the drawing but eliminated at a late stage.

Swales disliked Atkinson's changes to the front, which he listed as follows: 'the introduction of triple windows in the frieze; modification of the treatment of the iron bays; the substitution of the balustrade above the cornice in the place of a *chêneau* [ornamental cornice]; and the change in style of detail from the neo-Grec to that of Louis XVI'. As a result the design became top-heavy and lost refinement, he believed.<sup>38</sup> He also resented that the press attributed the whole building to Atkinson, and wrote to Burnham suggesting he vindicate his claim. But Burnham deprecated any such action, replying,

I do not think our clientage cares for this matter at all. It is generally a bore for the public to read about claims of authorship, discoverers of the North Pole etc. The public is disgusted with both sides in these controversies. I have long known this and have kept out of all discussions through the public front. There is no surer way of discrediting oneself and severely trying one's friends than persistently following up one's claims ... Therefore I cannot contribute anything to be printed in this controversy. I know all about the design in question, what mine was, and what his is. The best fellows in the profession know it too. They can 'tell' that which I would do and probably did, and can guess for themselves as to what happened.<sup>39</sup>

Incidentally, there is nowhere any hint of a tower overtopping the elevation at this stage of the story. That was almost certainly a later idea of Selfridge's, added when his *folie de grandeur* had advanced further.

### *Building the first section*

On a European holiday with his family, Daniel Burnham passed through London in April 1907. He had a long conference with Denell, manager of the Waring-White Building Company and an old acquaintance, before going on



to visit Selfridge at Foot's Cray.<sup>40</sup> That firm had signed a contract with Selfridge & Waring Ltd to build the new store the previous autumn, but could not get beyond clearing the site, excavating and putting in retaining walls (a substantial job, since there were to be three floors of basement) till the LCC gave the go-ahead in July 1907. Some construction work then started on the first section, initially 406–422 Oxford Street. But that autumn the crisis in Samuel Waring's finances deepened, the Selfridge & Waring partnership fell apart and building work stopped on site for about three months. The revised deal with John Musker took place in February 1908, and it was only in that month or even March that scheduled construction was resumed.

The first progress photographs date from August, showing the steel frame advanced to second-storey level and several columns for the front with their capitals already fixed. The south-east corner was less far forward, as these sites (398–404 Oxford Street and buildings behind in Duke Street) came late into possession and had been omitted from the official drawings signed in March. Here some remnants of old fronts could still be seen, behind a stylish hoarding which projected out over the pavement and bore the single word 'Selfridges' repeated along its frieze in large capital letters.<sup>41</sup> The Waring-White Company had been hired for their efficiency, so the pace of construction was fast but not frenetic; Selfridge told a journalist that no night-working had been involved except in the preliminary excavations, and little overtime had been paid. Nevertheless to catch up with the rest, the corner site had been built up to capital level in two weeks and five days, he boasted.<sup>42</sup>

The efficiency of the operation was made possible by the simple, repetitive steel-frame structure of the building – a method far from new in London at that date, though not yet a matter of course as it had become in America, and streamlined by co-ordinating architectural design with construction. The engineer responsible was the Swedish-born Sven Bylander, who had helped design steel-framed buildings in Germany and the United States before setting up in London and taking through large jobs for the

Waring-White Company, notably the Ritz Hotel. Presumably Bylander was in close touch with Burnham's firm throughout as the Selfridges design evolved; it was he who wrote up the fullest technical account of the building on completion.<sup>43</sup>

The essence of the structure was a grid of steel uprights at 24ft by 22ft centres, so not quite square, interrupted only by the block-concrete party walls which, to Selfridge's undying annoyance, had to be put in to divide the interior into compartments in conformity with LCC regulations, though they carried no loads. These walls were pierced by openings as large as the firm could secure from the authorities, fitted (as was standard in warehouse-class buildings) with iron doors which were left open during the day but could be closed in case of fire. Rolled steel joists bolted or rivetted to the uprights provided the horizontal element of the frame and supported floors of reinforced concrete, pierced by voids in some compartments for light wells. In fact only two of the compartments on each floor attained the maximum area sought, as all the others were compromised by irregularities at the edges of the site or by staircases, of which there were three at the back and two at the front, all utilitarian. In addition there were two small banks of lifts, both near Oxford Street entrances. The Waring-White Company chose not to publicize the provenance of their steelwork. But Bylander noted that it was not pre-fitted together at the manufacturer's and then adjusted; instead a resident inspector on site checked that every piece conformed precisely with the thousands of drawings.<sup>44</sup>

The external walls did not form part of the main building frame but were self-supporting structures locked into the floors for stiffening. Tiers of ornamental cast-iron windows (supplied by Walter Macfarlane & Co. of Glasgow) completely filled the voids, set well back along Oxford and Duke Streets so as to give these fronts dignity and depth and allow the great columns to appear at three-quarters profile; the overhang of the crowning cornice was estimated at 3ft 6in. All stonework was of Portland stone,

supplied (as at Waring & Gillow) by F. J. Barnes and Bath Stone Firms Ltd. The carving was by William B. Fagan (a sculptor known to have worked on other Waring-White contracts) and J. Arrowsmith from models supplied by Joseph Else, no doubt taken from exact architects' drawings.<sup>45</sup> These dispositions applied only along the front and side of the store; the Somerset Street elevation at the back – in fact the longest of the three – was finished off in brickwork.

All in all, the Selfridges structure represented a transitional moment in London's construction history, when the building regulations were evolving to cope with changing technologies but had not yet settled down. Its conspicuous presence and *éclat* undoubtedly speeded this process along, as Jeanne Lawrence was the first to show, and had a great impact on the subsequent design of British shops.<sup>46</sup>

#### *Opening and early years*

This first section of the store lay entirely on Hope-Edwardes freehold land. It was leased in five separate sections at substantial ground rents to Selfridge & Co. in February 1909 for terms ending in 1980.<sup>47</sup> After almost exactly a year of steady construction, it opened to unprecedented attention on a chilly day, 15<sup>th</sup> March 1909. Oxford Street had experienced avid crowds when Waring & Gillow and the Times Book Club opened, but the first days of Selfridges, orchestrated by masterful publicity, raised the bar for Edwardian consumer frenzy. Large, graphic and idealistic advertisements had promulgated the message which Selfridge endeavoured to convey from the outset, that his store would be no common-or-garden shop but an institution, there to provide a public service and a rendezvous, with shopping an essential element of an altogether larger social vision embracing community, comfort and entertainment. Staff too, 1,200 in number at the time of opening, were to

be decently treated. They were well paid by contemporary standards and enjoyed some freedom, since there was no living-in.

The first interiors offered almost a subdued background to this picture. Far from being extravagant, they were quite simply finished. All visible structural elements such as dropped beams and free-standing steel uprights were encased in plaster, using a heavy fluted Ionic order with festoons to the capitals and reeded cornices on the principal floors and a plain Tuscan finish higher up.<sup>48</sup> One novelty was the combination of unprecedentedly high storeys with unprecedentedly low counters, the latter kept down to restore some of the spatial generosity obstructed by the partition walls. The light wells and the ample fenestration, supplemented by electric lighting, ensured that the selling spaces appeared brighter than in previous large stores. The quality of the lighting and light fixtures had been carefully studied; it was on this particular point that Ernest Graham had written at length to Selfridge in 1908, shipping over sample fixtures as used at Marshall Field, which he claimed as 'the best lighted store in the world, so much superior to anything that was ever known before'.<sup>49</sup>

The *Daily Express* spoke of 'a palace of snow. Walls, columns, and ceilings are white. Crystal cascades formed of fine wire in which are threaded glittering glass balls fall down the two wells in the middle of the building. The roof of this cascade is a trellis work, interlaced with asparagus fern and maidenhead fern, while festoons of pale pink roses surround the balustrades of this wall on each floor'.<sup>50</sup> Abundant floral displays offered colour and perfume, while during the opening days music everywhere ('Melbaphones, Carusophones and bands of Zingaris and other musical brigands') pursued customers and sightseers to distraction.<sup>51</sup>

The interventionist shopwalker was abolished, so customers could glide around on the green-piled carpets, handling the goods and behaving as if the place was their own. The displays in the external windows in particular were treated following recent American window-dressing practice as

scenarios or works of art, on a par with the advertisements, not crammed with elaborate ranks of goods. As to the range of wares on offer, Selfridge appears to have raised his sights during the last year of construction. In an interview of 1908 he insisted he was intending a 'dry goods store' (to use the American term) on the lines of the Paris Bon Marché, with 'apparel' at the centre of its concerns, and would not be aiming to be a 'universal provider' like Harrods or Whiteleys.<sup>52</sup> But when Selfridges opened almost everything except food and furniture (left for Waring & Gillow) seems to have been stocked.

The selling space was confined to the ground, first and second floors together with the front half of the basement and part of the third floor. Though Selfridge himself doubtless determined the location and relation of the different departments, the claim made by his subsequent advertising manager, A. H. Williams, that he had planned every detail of the structure and layout in advance may be dismissed as hyperbole.<sup>53</sup> At the top came Selfridges' special facilities: a series of reception rooms including a library, a 'silence room' or 'rest room' (for ladies only), a 'smoke room' (the equivalent for men), reading, writing and 'rendezvous' rooms, a picture gallery, 'national rooms', sundry postal, parcel and ticket offices and an information bureau on the third floor, and then on the fourth floor a restaurant or luncheon room occupying half the built-up space and communicating with an outside pergola and roof garden. The management offices were also on an upper level, in the north-east corner. Excepting the national rooms (French, German, American and Colonial), there was perhaps nothing absolutely novel in any of these features or about their design, but their concentration and instant popularity set a new standard and tone for large London shops. The siting of the restaurant followed practice at Marshall Field, where the main refreshment rooms were on the seventh floor. It soon became known as the Palm Court Restaurant, on account of single palm trees positioned in the two light wells. It was destroyed by incendiary bombs in 1941.<sup>54</sup>

The roof garden started out as a simple three-sided pergola or covered walkway at the Duke Street end between hardwood columns, round which planting was trained. An outdoor space in the centre was taken up by a small number of tables in clement weather but could be cleared for small ceremonies and displays. Gradually the rest of the available rooftop was opened up to other activities. Just as Selfridge the showman secured the aeroplane in which Blériot had flown the Channel in July 1909 for temporary display on the lower ground floor, so he is said to have hoped to re-erect on his roof the stones of Crosby Hall, then up for grabs.<sup>55</sup> That came to nothing, but a shooting range opened in September 1909. After access to the roof had been improved, the restaurant expanded, and rock gardens, a pond and putting space for golfers appeared in 1911–12. But since light wells took up much of the roof space, the public area continued to be restricted.<sup>56</sup>

*Plans for expansion, 1909–14*

Having planned on so lavish a scale, Selfridge could not expect to make money quickly. Starting a store on a big scale from scratch was entirely novel, at least in Britain, and though he was at pains to tell his shareholders that the practice was common enough in France, Germany and America it is difficult to point to precedents. Figures given in 1910 for his outlay were as follows: £773,804 for purchase of leaseholds; £320,706 for construction; £61,321 for fixtures; while the total including advertising and stock was estimated at £1,571,767, omitting staff costs. So the expense of acquiring the site came to about half the whole. That is corroborated by property transactions, which show Selfridge paying high prices for some of these first sites in his own name – £20,000 for Nos 410–414, £28,000 for Nos 420–424 – and thus contributing to an inflation in Oxford Street values. Additionally he was paying a ground rent of £11,470 a year, rounded down to £10,000 when he spoke to shareholders, claiming that was only a quarter of what he would

have had to pay in Chicago.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless in 1911 the ebullient Selfridge was able to claim a substantial net profit on turnover and to have contributed not only to his own enterprise but to the whole street's prosperity. An American-style bargain basement, introduced that year, widened the store's appeal.

In March 1914 Selfridge was able to buy out John Musker's share by making fresh arrangements with the London City and Midland Bank.<sup>58</sup> Now more than ever he was the absolute master of Selfridge & Co., and his expansion plans could take shape. Two fresh acquisitions ensued. The first was of the former Thrupp & Maberly premises opposite, at 421–429 Oxford Street. These were converted into the first Selfridges Provision Store to H. O. Ellis & Partners' designs and opened quietly at the end of the year. Selfridge also employed the Ellis firm to alter William Ruscoe's drapery next west at 424–426 Oxford Street. He had bought the head lease and taken over the back premises in 1908–9, but had to pay a whopping £18,000 for Ruscoe's remaining thirteen years' sublease of the shops in front in 1913. The addition took the store to the centre of the whole Duke Street to Orchard Street frontage. But for the moment Selfridge delayed rebuilding these premises.<sup>59</sup>

Beyond Ruscoe's he was also able to buy up most of the rest of the front up to Orchard Street, numbering 428–432, 436–440 and 444–454 Oxford Street. All these new addresses lay on the Portman Estate and were held under leases by a rival drapery, T. Lloyd & Co. That firm, of recent growth, might have dominated this whole frontage but for the advent of Selfridges. Thomas Lloyd, from Llanybydder, Carmarthenshire, had started small in 1892 as a young man of 25 with a single shop, 452 Oxford Street. Then in the conventional way he had gradually taken over neighbouring properties, rebuilding and connecting houses as he went with the architectural help of the ubiquitous Augustus E. Hughes. Lloyd's career was uncannily like that of Tom Harries, a fellow Carmarthen-born draper some blocks further east, and indeed after Harries's early death in 1900 he became chairman of T. J. Harries & Co., only to die himself two years later at the equally young age of 45. His

family and partners incorporated the company as T. Lloyd & Company in 1905. The shop continued to thrive, employing some hundreds, with staff hostels in Somerset Street behind. At the time of Selfridge's take-over Lloyds was derisively referred to as 'those little yellow shops where ladies with bustles once bought antimacassars for their horsehair furniture'. Nevertheless the business was prospering and the premises had just been reconditioned to comply with LCC fire regulations.<sup>60</sup> Acquiring these properties entailed negotiating a new head lease from the Portman Estate, with whom Selfridges was to have much to do in years to come, generally on good terms.

*Dreams of a dome and tower, 1915–26*

The press announcement of this acquisition stated that all the Lloyds premises were to be pulled down 'as quickly as possible' and that the Selfridges building would be extended over these sites.<sup>61</sup> As war intervened, that could not happen. The delay seems only to have whetted Selfridge's ambitions. By January 1915 he had hired Sir John Burnet to complete the store, in other words to extend the existing plan and front to cover the whole Duke Street to Orchard Street block, stretching back to Somerset Street.

Burnet was an architect of standing, with offices at this stage of his career in both Glasgow and London. He had recently been knighted for his King Edward VII Galleries at the British Museum, whose monumental Montague Place elevation bears resemblances to the Selfridges front. While Selfridge may naturally have been drawn to so exalted a figure, Burnet could hardly have wished to take on the mere continuation of an existing design, unless a wartime shortage of work influenced his decision.<sup>62</sup> More likely, he was tempted by the allure of building a great dome or tower. That Selfridge now for the first time held out as the crowning feature of his store, set at the back behind the future central entrance.

This vision began to take shape in 1915. In February of that year Selfridges told his shareholders that much time and effort had been spent on the new buildings, while in April according to Pound he signed a contract



with Burnet.<sup>63</sup> Various sets of Burnet office drawings from that year survive, the largest cluster dating from January, plus a few from May and July. Most are plans, showing the whole centre and west end of the store laid out in the open American style, as had now become possible following changes in the regulations, with the inexorable grid marching on, interrupted only by banks of elevators (so named). All staircases were relegated to the edges of the building. That essentially was the plan adopted when rebuilding took place in 1919–23; and in this respect Burnet may well have been working up an extension scheme devised by Selfridge and one or more of his architects before the war. The one departure from this pattern is in the centre, where space and foundations are shown for a dome sited at the back of a deep entrance hall. Behind come a grand staircase against the Somerset Street front, and flanking halls or light wells west and east of the dome.<sup>64</sup>

The closest precedent for this feature was at Harrods, where C. W. Stephens had finished off the Brompton Road front (1901–5) with a terracotta-clad dome in the centre. That was quite modest in size and essentially a decorative topknot over the store, since the upper floors at Harrods were occupied as flats. Nevertheless the Harrods dome seems to have inspired *Hugo*, Arnold Bennett's 'fantasia' of 1906 about a London department store and its owner. In *Hugo* the eponymous owner creates a nine-storey building with a frontage to Sloane Street five hundred feet long and a semi-open dome beneath which he sleeps. The novel was written before Selfridge came to England, and is unlikely to have inspired him, but it shows that such ambitions had been in the air since Edwardian days.

As to external appearance, early sketch elevations by Burnet suggest domes of octagonal shape, Renaissance or Wren-like in derivation and topped off at over 300ft, in other words well over twice the height of the existing Selfridges parapet, with four flanking tourelles of lower height at the corners. The clearest drawing dates from May 1915, and carries a note that a height of

350ft was agreed with the LCC in March 1916. So the dome project had then gone beyond something cooked up privately between client and architect.

Thus far a straightforward story can be traced. But Selfridge also at various stages invited alternative ideas for the dome or tower unconnected with the Burnet firm. The earliest (which survives only in a photograph of the front elevation) shows a monumental classical clocktower and is signed 'Graham Burnham & Co', thus dating it to between 1912 and 1917, as that was the name of the successor firm to D. H. Burnham & Co. only between these years, after which it became Graham, Anderson, Probst & White. It confirms that Selfridge kept in touch with the Burnham firm, presumably via Ernest Graham, after the first part of the store had been completed, but its authorship and provenance are otherwise unclear. More familiar is Philip Tilden's tower design, produced early in 1918 at a time when Tilden was being employed by Selfridge to design a dream castle at Hengistbury Head on the South Coast, which the tycoon had purchased in search of a venue to quench his growing appetite for distractions and entertainments. The best-known version of this vulgar fantasy adopts a 'Mausoleum of Halicarnassus' idiom, but Tilden sketched out various pencil alternatives, all far higher than anything proposed by Burnet and incompatible with any future roof garden.<sup>65</sup>

Yet another candidate in this collection of gargantuan domes and towers is known only from copies of an elevation and a perspective dated 1920 and signed by Albert D. Millar (1878–1940), the American who was to become Selfridges' in-house architect throughout the inter-war period, and of whom more is said below. Mistakenly attributed by Honeycombe to Burnet working with Frank Atkinson, the scheme displays a grandiose wedding-cake dome and vast projecting portico, twelve columns wide, of Washingtonian pedigree. Never plausible as a solution for completing the Oxford Street block, this design was probably made as a further sop for Selfridge's vanity.<sup>66</sup>

But by 1920 the Burnet firm had reasserted aesthetic control over the whole extension project, including the tower or dome. Thomas Tait had been

taken into full partnership with Burnet at the end of the war. Under his aegis the scheme became fixed in principle around 1919 as a tall tower over an enclosed dome, with flanking corner features as before. The details of the tower were to undergo many further changes, but the dimensions of the dome may well have been determined around this time, as certainly was the outline design of the central entrance from Oxford Street. William Reid Dick received a definite contract to design bronze sculpture for this entrance in 1919, and it is likely that Burnet & Tait's other artistic coadjutors for the whole centre of the building were also agreed with at the same time. However not until 1923 do the Selfridge & Co. minute books note who they were to be: Reid Dick, Henry Poole and Gilbert Bayes were then to share the sculptural honours with the lesser-known Ernest Gillick. A fifth name is appended: that of the famous Frank Brangwyn; his name was given to the press in March 1923 as someone who was to work on the interior of the extension then about to be started, but his commission soon resolved itself into that of decorating the dome. All these artists had then been paid a quarter of their fee by way of an advance.<sup>67</sup>

At that point Brangwyn was hard at work on his commission, which was to cover the spandrels of the dome and the soffits of its supporting arches. He interpreted his allotted subject, 'The Trade of the World', in his characteristically exotic style, one that chimed well with Selfridge's book *The Romance of Commerce* (1918). The cartoons were produced in a special studio at Baron's Court which Brangwyn had hired because they were so big. He struggled at first to get the correct dimensions for the perspective, but achieved it with the help of a French engineer. He was ready with his cartoons by 1924, when they were partly published. As at St Aidan's, Leeds, he decided to execute them in glass mosaic instead of fresco, because of London's dirty atmosphere. But the chance was never to come.<sup>68</sup>

Around 1925–6 Tait made a striking final series of designs in order to finalize the tower itself. Some rise to a baroque-style crown, and in a few the

corner features at the base turn into little *chattris* or Indian pavilions, derived from Lutyens' designs for Delhi; these would have made charming features in the layered roof gardens which seem then to have been in prospect at the tower's foot. In just one a lower domical crown is retained. But the clear favourites were tapering stone towers influenced by the American-classical skyscrapers of Bertram Goodhue. One such design, topped off pyramidally by a version of the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus as it was then understood, was chosen for the final maquette (made by the Plaster Decoration Co.), of which numerous photographs survive.<sup>69</sup>

Unquestionably the tower had become a serious ambition, and remained so up to the completion in 1928 of the central Oxford Street entrance, which was conceived as a prelude to the dome. Why then was it never built? Such fleeting remarks as there are blame the failure on the LCC, some alleging that the foundations of the tower were feared to threaten the Central Line beneath. But there were other obstacles. The proposed site of the tower lay exactly on the dividing line between the Hope Edwardes and Portman freeholds. It transpires from the Portman Estate minutes of 1920 that in order to facilitate matters Selfridge had agreed to convey his own share of the tower site to the Portmans but had encountered 'difficulties'.<sup>70</sup> Seemingly these were never resolved. In the absence of further official memoranda or press references, it seems wiser to assume that the decline of Gordon Selfridge's financial fortunes from the time he took over Whiteleys in 1927 put paid to the tower. His grand visions continued unabashed, but they never came as close to realization, and after the recession of the early 1930s set in they became implausible.

*The Oxford Street block completed, 1919–27*

In parallel with the fluctuating designs for the dome and tower went the practical task of completing the Oxford Street block. This Selfridge entrusted

in 1918 not to Burnet & Tait, consultants only for the overall architectural design, but to the Chicago firm of Graham, Anderson, Probst & White and their 'London manager', Albert D. Millar.

Millar is an even more shadowy figure than Francis Swales, but there is evidence that the two had known one another as young assistants in St Louis. Since then he had worked for various architects in the United States, notably McKim, Mead & White, and presumably also for the Burnham successor firm.

His passport application, made at the end of 1918, states explicitly that he was coming to Britain on behalf of Graham, Anderson, Probst & White to make drawings for Selfridges. Doubtless Selfridge was in a hurry to complete the store now that the war was over, and had asked the firm to send over someone to help, believing that American architects were best equipped to lay out shops and supervise construction. That role Millar now proceeded meticulously to fulfil. The 1920 fantasy perspective apart, there is little sign of any creative input on his part into the store's design.

The 'Second Operation', as it was called, consisted of extending Selfridges over the whole of the former Thomas Lloyd sites.<sup>2</sup> It fell into two parts, the north-west section (Orchard Street and Somerset Street) in 1919–22, followed by the south-west section (Orchard Street and Oxford Street) in 1923–4. The builders throughout were F. D. Huntington Ltd, the successor to the Waring-White Company, which had been dissolved in 1911. A graduate of Cornell University, Huntington had first come to Britain to work on contracts for the Westinghouse Company, before joining Waring-White and supervising many of their large Edwardian jobs, though not apparently the pre-war phase of Selfridges. After working in other countries Huntington returned to London following the First World War and founded his firm, run like Waring-White on American managerial lines. He was described as a

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<sup>2</sup> Honeycombe (p.155) shows a plan which divides the operations into a different series of sequences. Here the numbering follows that used at the time.

‘forceful and charming personality, combined with a breezy American manner and accent’.<sup>71</sup>

Huntington and Millar initially shared the same business address, 11 Hanover Square, suggesting the work was done by negotiated contract, but for at least the 1923–4 section Huntingtons won the work by competitive tender<sup>72</sup> As well as the supervision of the whole, the design of the structure and services was in the hands of Graham, Anderson, Probst & White. Developed well beyond what had been available in 1909, the services, readers of the *Architects’ Journal* were told, ‘have received particular technical study by the architects’ specialists in conjunction with the architectural design, and not by outside specialists as is usual’.<sup>73</sup>

These extensions proceeded at least initially in bursts, whereby a section was built up to first-floor level only, then temporarily roofed over, so that a department could be moved in from old property and that old section embarked upon before the upper levels of the new building were added. The levels of the excavation once more entailed deep foundations, supplemented by a novel technique for lining the retaining wall. Also new were the generous, marble-lined staircases, all arranged at the building’s periphery and designed to attract shoppers down to the basement, now as important a part of the selling space as the upper floors. The grouped lifts acquired growing design attention as the extensions progressed, and came to be lacquered in different colours.<sup>74</sup>

The interiors of the extended store continued earlier arrangements with low, glass-faced counters and stubby columns marking the position of the stanchions, Ionic and fluted on the main floors, plain at upper levels, all simpler but perhaps subtler in detail than the patterns of the 1909 section.<sup>75</sup> The internal dividing walls insisted upon in the first section could now be dispensed with, allowing the shopping space to appear as ‘one large compartment on each floor’. Good electric lighting mattered more now in the centre of the block, as there were few light wells. Men’s departments, men’s

hairdressing saloons and the like occupied much of the 1919–22 extension. In the centre back portion, the second operation concluded in 1924–5 with the slotting-in of a ‘semi-permanent building and passage-ways’ to link the old and new buildings, in the space reserved for the ‘monumental central court’ and its flanking light wells.<sup>76</sup>

A Cyril Farey perspective of 1923 shows the great Oxford Street front all but complete, with a few little houses in the centre, sandwiched and almost crushed by the east and west wings on either side of them and awaiting demolition for the great entrance and tower.<sup>77</sup> When it came to the point, the tower was not affordable. So Tait had to concentrate his energies on the embellishment of the central entrance itself and the hall behind. The outline of this frontispiece, with its noble portico and wider spacing of the two free-standing columns, probably goes back to Burnet’s first ideas of 1915, while we know that the design had developed far enough for Reid Dick to be commissioned in 1919 to design sculpture for the loggia (as the space behind the columns was called).<sup>78</sup>

Surviving drawings for the design are few. Two undated sketches in the Burnet & Tait album show the great loggia windows and doors without the frontispiece, and the relation between the square piers carrying the columns in antis and the marquise. A more finished perspective of 1926, confirmed by an office drawing, depicts the general external appearance of the portico. No statuary is shown in the void between the columns, but a pretty figure balances with outstretched arms on the parapet – perhaps Commerce, who at one stage had been destined to surmount the tower. This figure was entrusted to the sculptor Henry Poole, who died before its completion.<sup>79</sup>

This centre composition, built as Selfridges’ ‘Third Operation’ in 1927–8, became the remarkable climax of the Oxford Street block. On this occasion the Huntington firm seems not to have been involved, perhaps because Huntington himself severed his connection with the business around this

time. That left Millar to co-ordinate the separate trades, from the Belgian steelwork contractors to many smaller enterprises. The notable feature of the operation was the orchestration of the many artists and craftsmen who had been promised work on the store to produce a masterpiece of decorative arts and crafts, blending older Beaux-Arts traditions of architectural sculpture and metalwork with the zestful brio of the Paris Arts Décoratifs Exhibition of 1925. The overall composition was doubtless Tait's, probably worked out with the assistance of his trusted assistant A. D. Bryce. But there are many hints of Millar's attention to details of proportion and arrangement.

As regards the loggia, the primary artist was Reid Dick, who furnished not only the full-length flanking figures of Art and Science at either end of the doors but the reliefs of putti that frame the great window, engaged in various endeavours and pursuits. All these were in bronze, cast by the A. B. Burton foundry at Thames Ditton. Also of bronze were the standard lamps in front of the doors, supplied by Walter Gilbert, and the door frames themselves, enriched by George Alexander. Present too at the time of opening was the sleek and colourful entrance canopy or marquise, 68ft long and designed by the French metalworker Edgar Brandt, who had made his international reputation at the 1925 exhibition. It was originally illuminated at night.<sup>80</sup>

The central feature, the celebrated Queen of Time, in gilt bronze with faience, stoneware and mosaic accoutrements, seems to have been an afterthought. Commissioned from Gilbert Bayes only in 1930, it was installed above the central door in October of the following year. It strikes a sentimental note at odds with Dick's contributions. Surmounted on a ship's prow and attended by nereids representing the tides and winged figures representing the hours, the golden Queen holds an orb with a figure symbolizing Progress in her right hand while raising an olive branch in her left. Behind her rises an enormous globular clock with two faces surmounted by a further merchant ship. At an upper stage between parapet and lintel stands a single plain bell made by Gillett & Johnston.<sup>81</sup> Bayes evidently



appealed to Selfridges, as he was retained to make further ship roundels formerly on the lobby floor, a Pegasus panel in honour of the staff and, later, a bronze plaque in honour of Selfridge, installed in the Palm Court Restaurant in 1940.<sup>82</sup>

The interior of the new centre was a spatial anti-climax after the heroics of the loggia, since it was envisaged merely as an introduction to a deeper hall destined to preface the dome but never executed. As originally completed it consisted of a compact square hall with the centre opened up as a light well from basement to roof level. A rank of escalators from basement to ground floor reinforced the significance of the bargain basement. At ground level, four banks of two lifts on each side took the place of the four banks of six contemplated on the 1915 plans. But the expenditure on ornamenting the lifts was now lavish, on a par with the chic of their uniformed female attendants. As with the front, bronzework was to the fore, notably in the lift enclosures and doors enriched with signs of the Zodiac, once again designed by Gilbert Bayes and made by the Birmingham Guild. The interiors of the lift cars were finished by reproductions in repoussé metal of a design by Edgar Brandt which Gordon Selfridge had seen at the Paris 1925 Exposition, showing storks ('Les cigognes d'Alsace') backed by outré sunbursts.<sup>83</sup> These celebrated lifts were removed in 1978; one bank survives in the Museum of London while a further panel is in the Brighton Museum. The painting scheme for the entrance hall was entrusted to George Murray (author of the Peter Robinson restaurant murals), but seems not to have included figurative work; this like the lifts has disappeared.<sup>84</sup>

### *The roof garden redesigned*

Before the completion of the Oxford Street block, the Selfridges roof garden had grown up in an additive way. An ice skating rink had been added in 1924, but with the creation of the new centre it now became possible to

redesign the garden as a whole. The task was entrusted to Marjory Allen (later Lady Allen of Hurtwood), who had not long before embarked on a career in landscape gardening and together with her professional partner Richard Sudell helped to found the Institute of Landscape Architects. Claimed as the largest such project of its kind at that date (1929–30), the Selfridges roof garden was the most prominent job of Allen and Sudell's short three-year partnership. The design was linear, occupying only the front or Oxford Street side of the block, so about 500ft long but only 100ft deep, suggesting that it was compatible with the projected tower, still not definitely abandoned. Described as 'an English garden of old-fashioned flowers, lawn, formal pool, pergola, a cherry walk, and fantail pigeons',<sup>85</sup> the composition in fact consisted of a sequence of contrasting elements: a pair of formal gardens at the west end with central water features, flanked by a 'vine walk'; a rose and bulb garden in the centre between the stairs and lifts; and at the east end a rock garden and an old English garden.<sup>86</sup>

The redesigned roof garden was formally opened to the public in 1930 and at first claimed 35,000 visitors a week, acquiring the nickname of 'the hanging gardens of London'. The formal gardens at the west end became popular for fashion parades. From the horticultural point of view Marjory Allen claimed it 'excelled all expectations', allowing greater control than in a normal garden and new conclusions to be drawn as to how particular plants fared in rooftop conditions.<sup>87</sup> But the gardens closed in 1940 and were partly converted into vegetable plots. When peace came, they never reopened.

#### *The SWOD block and later extensions*

The near-continuous alterations to the interior of Selfridges' main building since 1930 cannot find a place in such an account as this. Nor are the changing fortunes and ownership of the store included, since they are well covered in Gordon Honeycombe's history, at least up to 1984. Another subject, that of the

costly decorations which Gordon Selfridge personally sponsored for jubilees and coronations from 1935 onwards, will be found in the book's introduction. Here it remains to deal in brief with the store's northward extensions beyond the Oxford Street area.

Well before the main frontage of his store was complete, Selfridge was pursuing the possibility of extending beyond the bounds of his quadrilateral. In 1921–3 he was in negotiation with the Portman Estate to take part of the adjoining block west of Orchard Street.<sup>88</sup> That came to naught, so he turned his attention northwards. Some few properties on the north side of Somerset Street were already in Selfridge's hands. But in the mid to late 1920s he embarked on a campaign of acquisition, buying up leases and (where he could) freeholds all the way up to Wigmore Street, with the aim of occupying and building upon the whole of this northern rectangle – an area almost twice the size of the completed store on Oxford Street. Bounded by Somerset, Wigmore, Orchard and Duke Streets, this became known as the SWOD block. Most of these purchases had been made by 1928. Thereafter Selfridge secured two key properties, the Somerset Hotel facing Orchard Street, and the redundant St Thomas's Church, with which went a neighbouring school. The church and school were bought following long-drawn-out negotiations, and demolished in 1932 to create a temporary car park. But several Wigmore Street properties eluded Selfridge's grasp. He finally bought the Grotian Hall there as late as 1938.<sup>89</sup>

Selfridge proceeded to compensate himself for the failure to build his tower by encouraging Thomas Tait in 1930–1 to produce new sketches for the SWOD block. Surviving drawings show that the scheme in contemplation was no less grandiose in its full-blown classicism than the original store. The three different versions sketched out all link up the existing block to this new one, making one gigantic store running all the way from Oxford Street to Wigmore Street. Internal avenues along both axes were to divide the store into four, meeting in a new grand dome area where the Brangwyn murals or

their equivalent were to find a new home. Pillared frontispieces were to face both Wigmore and Orchard Streets. The drawings depicting this elaborate composition no doubt originated with Tait, but some are signed EW, in other words Edwin Williams, a senior Burnet & Tait assistant at this time who went on later to hold an important role in the LCC Architect's Department.<sup>90</sup>

It is hard to credit that anyone can have taken this fresh essay in monumentalism seriously, given the fiasco of the tower and the climate of retrenchment that dominated commerce in the early 1930s. Yet Selfridges certainly needed to expand. To that end the firm obtained permission in principle for its SWOD scheme from Marylebone Borough Council in June 1931. The Wigmore Street frontage not yet having been secured, the understanding at that juncture was that the main entrance would be from a 200ft portico facing Orchard Street. The Council was concerned about traffic and parking, and it was agreed that Somerset Street would only be closed to traffic once the whole block had been completed.<sup>91</sup>

The firm's first priority was to build a loading dock set back from Duke Street. This was aggrandized into a four-storey extension running north from the Somerset Street corner to Edward's Mews. Two storeys above ground and two below, it was designed by Millar (nominally on behalf of Graham, Anderson, Probst & White), planned in 1931 and opened in 1933.<sup>92</sup> It had limited retailing space or architectural character, but its stone facings and piers, corresponding in proportion to the Oxford Street building, suggested it might be the start of something bigger and better. Two simple bridges across Somerset Street linked the extension to the main block. There was a hint in November 1932 that this modest building would house Brangwyn's cartoons in its entrance corridor, perhaps as a temporary measure until the grander SWOD block could be realized.<sup>93</sup> In the event it stood alone for two decades. It was badly defaced after being taken over during the Second World War by the Post Office and the US Army.<sup>94</sup> The store reclaimed it only in the 1950s, adding extra storeys piecemeal. A further plain addition across the Duke

Street end of Somerset Street, set well back, provided a new link in 1968 between the main block and the SWOD extension.<sup>95</sup>

During the post-war period Lewis's Investment Trust Ltd, by then the owners of Selfridges, decided to curtail the whole SWOD ambition and to sell off the properties which Selfridge had painstakingly acquired further north. A large garage was built in 1957–9 midway along Somerset Street (Duke & Simpson, architects). At the far end of that street, Selfridges Food Store had been moved out of 421–423 Oxford Street into the former Somerset Hotel, opening in 1936. Following the final closure of Somerset Street in the 1960s, the hotel was rebuilt in two stages so as to make a new Food Store with the Selfridge Hotel on top (David A. P. Brookbank & Associates, architects, 1971–3).<sup>96</sup>

In the 1990s a project was brought forward by Foster Associates to reorganize the unco-ordinated northern areas behind the main store with six-storey buildings facing Orchard and Duke Streets and a higher hotel block in between.<sup>97</sup> Plans changed after the Anglo-Canadian businessman Galen Weston bought Selfridges through his family holding company in 2003.<sup>98</sup> In 2011 after a competition the architect Renzo Piano was hired to make an overall feasibility plan for the northern properties. Once Selfridges had studied the ideas generated by Piano's plan, it brought in the American firm of Gensler to look in detail at the eastern side of the SWOD sites, with a view to recasting the existing Duke Street extension, removing the goods ramp and joining the extension on to the main Oxford Street block more formally and worthily.<sup>99</sup>

Once the ramp had been relocated, David Chipperfield Architects were chosen to implement this plan in 2014. After further study, Chipperfields elected to rebuild the link between the main block and the SWOD extension to a fresh design, intended to be as dignified and spacious as the old store and to unify these previously disparate entities. The work took place in 2016–18.

Externally the new Duke Street entrance is set less far back than the previous 1968 building occupying the site. It faces across to Barrett Street and is fronted in bronze, glass and piers faced in dark terrazzo. It is enriched by a granite bench and drinking fountain in the street by the landscapist Irene Djaou Rakitine, and by a changing series of art works in the foyer on loan for six months at a time from the Yorkshire Sculpture Park. The high interior follows the grid of the main store. It is floored in white terrazzo and interrupted by square piers with cladding that contrast with the round columns in the old main block and the SWOD extension, with both of which the Duke Street building is seamlessly integrated. The upshot of these interventions has been to make the interior of Selfridges more coherent than it has been since the 1920s. Much of the block up to Wigmore Street has now been repurchased, and indeed the main staff entrance to the store has faced that street since 2014.<sup>100</sup>

At the time of writing Selfridges is contemplating further building works in the north-west area of the site.