

Chapter 13

1-59 Oxford Street

Charing Cross Road to Soho Street

Oxford Street's south side commences at the time of writing with a vast building site behind the corner entrance to Tottenham Court Road Station, reaching round far down Charing Cross Road. The former sequence of buildings starts only at No. 27, whence a series of minor shops, eateries and upstairs offices (many of them language schools) occupies the frontage westwards to Soho Street and beyond. This section of the street, fronting the northern edge of Soho, has been under heavy development pressure in recent years, and further rebuildings are anticipated.

The character of this part of the street has never been smart. It was the earliest section to attract development, as northern Soho began to take shape from the 1670s. The Oxford Street frontage is shown as fairly continuous up to Dean Street on the Ogilby & Morgan map of 1681-2, yet ratebooks suggest it was only 'perhaps half built' by 1685.¹ The plots east of Soho (originally Charles) Street were shallow ones, constrained by the proximity of Soho Square and its service lanes close behind.

That original development took place under a long lease of Soho Fields obtained from Charles II by Henry Jermyn, Earl of St Albans, who in 1673 sublet most of the land to Joseph Girle, the Marylebone brewer. Girle already had a controlling interest in the opposite frontage of Tyburn Road or Oxford Street, and must have been in the throes of planning Soho with the bricklayer Richard Frith when he died in 1677. By then Girle was rated for several of the low-key buildings which had sprung up along the south

side. Much of this frontage was probably rebuilt in the 1730s, around the time when Oxford Street was improved by the turnpike trustees.

Beneficial ownership of most of Soho Fields had by then passed to the Portland family, and a densification of the fringe properties took place. The new leases taken by building tradesmen at this time were mostly for 65 years.² So by the mid eighteenth century the frontage here consisted of the array of continuous humble houses and shops typical of Georgian Oxford Street, interrupted by a couple of yards, Goodwin's Court and Brewer's Court. The Horwood map of the 1790s shows an even run of such houses, which by then were numbered from 413 just east of the Soho (Charles) Street corner to 440 at the corner with Crown Street, formerly Hog Lane and the ancestor of Charing Cross Road. The Portlands sold off their freeholds during that decade. The whole Oxford Street frontage up to Soho Street and a little beyond was bought (together with many other Soho properties) by the wealthy tallow and spermaceti candle manufacturer Francis Glossop of Old Compton Street. Some houses were sold by the long-lived Glossop in the 1820s, but others remained in the hands of his descendants as part of the so-called Glossop estate till the end of the nineteenth century.³

No notable enterprises are connected with this stretch of the street. Two pretty trade cards convey the sundry businesses that might be found here. A rococo one of c.1780 advertises the services of Thomas Dobson, No. 427 (later 27), leather pipe and bucket maker, who pitched his wares towards 'Gentlemen, Merchants, Captains & others ... for Home Consumption or Exportation'; this was also the address in the 1780s of the engraver Richard Sawyer, later in Dean Street, Soho.⁴ A picturesque card of around the 1830s depicting contented cows promotes Samuel Shelverton's Alderney Barn Dairy at No. 420 (later 43).⁵ At No. 418 (later 45) Tallis lists Baronto's alabaster warehouse in the late 1830s. This was a short-lived affair, but Louis Baronto, 'sculptor', and his young family have been traced

as living in 1841 at an address further east, No. 363 (later 165) close to the Pantheon; they soon afterwards emigrated to New York.⁶

Two pubs are listed in nineteenth-century directories, the Mischief at No. 414 (later 53) near the Charles or Soho Street corner and the Three Tuns at No. 429 (later 23) further east. The Mischief was an abbreviation for the Man Loaded with Mischief, an occasional pub name around 1750. An image popular in prints of that period adorned the pub sign, depicting a working man weighed down by a buxom, carousing wife upon his shoulders, with appropriate symbols of folly – a monkey, magpie and other animals. The sign was stylish enough to earn an attribution to Hogarth, and an engraving of it which was displayed in the pub window can be identified with a print published c.1750 by Bowles & Carver on the basis of a description in Larwood & Hotten's *History of Signboards*.⁷

Some sense of the Crown Street (Charing Cross Road) end of the street in the 1840s is given by an engraving illustrating the premises of William Grimstone, 'eye snuff inventor', at No. 434 (later 13) in its context. Eye snuff was a tobacco-free concoction claimed as curing various diseases of the eyes and nerves and as enjoying both royal patronage and that of 'Lords of the Treasury'. Grimstone's original premises were in Broad Street, Bloomsbury, whence he moved to Oxford Street in the early 1840s. Bird's eye engravings of both addresses used in his publicity show them as almost identical, with the manufacturing plant directly behind the shop, and may not be wholly reliable. After leaving Oxford Street, Grimstone traded in a hair restorer known as the 'aromatic regenerator'.⁸

Later comments about the district tend to be disparaging. In 1910, when much rebuilding was happening hereabouts following the opening of the Central Line, it was remarked: 'Shops of a certain type appear to do fairly well here, but it is not an office centre'.⁹ For Eduardo Paolozzi, charged in the 1980s with decorating the interior surfaces of the tube station adjacent, its shabbiness was just what appealed:

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Oxford Street at Tottenham Court Road is the nearest that London gets to Calcutta with its squalor, and multi-racial crowds; it's a rich, churning mass of people, with lights, events, cinemas, hamburgers and fast food, and a lot of the fast food is eaten on the way down to the platforms.¹⁰

Tottenham Court Road Station and surroundings

Today (2019) the south side of the street starts with one of the entrance pavilions designed by Stanton Williams, architects, for the new eastern concourse of Tottenham Court Road Tube Station, opened in 2015. It represents the latest stage in this station's tortuous evolution.

Before the 1880s Oxford Street extended a little further east, but the corner had been shaved off to a curve when Charing Cross Road was created out of the former Crown Street as part of the Metropolitan Board of Works' road programme for the West End. Rebuilding on this curving corner site at Nos 1-7, mostly facing Charing Cross Road, took place in 1887-8 under the auspices of the Sloane Street estate agents Marler & Bennett and the architect T. Marcus Houghton. The upshot was a four-storey block with small crowning gables in the roof, later much altered at lower levels, notably for the reconstruction of a London and Provincial Bank branch at Nos 3-5 in 1927-8.¹¹

The frontage next west, at Nos 9-15, became the original entrance of the first Tottenham Court Road Station, opened as the easternmost of the Central London Railway's four Oxford Street stations in July 1900. The company took more land than was needed for the station itself, which was initially a single-storey building at No. 11 designed by Harry B. Measures, with a simple interior containing a booking office and lift entrances. The rest of the ground was leased out for construction in 1904, at which point the station became enveloped in Nos 9-15, four storeys high, fronted in the same florid terracotta idiom as the station but attributed to a different

architect, Delissa Joseph. No. 9 was the entrance to the upper-storey offices, while Nos 13 & 15 were shops.¹²

The first stage in the station's expansion took place in 1907, when the Charing Cross, Euston & Hampstead Railway (later the Northern Line) opened its own station at this major crossroads. It had three original entrances, all just staircases from street level without superstructures: two were at the bottom of Tottenham Court Road on either side, and the third was at the top of St Giles High Street, on part of the present Centre Point site.¹³ The booking hall and lifts were below ground, where there was also a subterranean connection with the Central's platforms. This station began with the name Oxford Street, as 'Tottenham Court Road' had been reserved for what is now the Northern Line's Goodge Street Station, but the confusion was quickly rectified and the Tottenham Court Road name substituted from March 1908.

After the Central's semi-amalgamation in 1913 into the Underground group which owned the Northern Line, the two stations could be integrated. That took place in 1925–6, when a new booking hall was constructed beneath St Giles' Circus with escalators leading to both lines. Thereafter 11 Oxford Street became merely an entrance with a stair leading down to the booking hall. Despite further improvements in the 1930s, the station grew increasingly cramped.¹⁴

The first foreshadowings of the site's total redevelopment came in the 1950s. Under the original London County Council traffic plan which led to the construction of Centre Point on its roundabout, a second or western roundabout was also envisaged which would have obliterated the whole Charing Cross Road–Oxford Street corner. That came to nothing. But following an agreement of 1960 between the LCC and London Transport new entrances and subways from the environs of Centre Point into the booking hall were created.¹⁵

A reconstruction of the booking hall in 1972–3 hardly alleviated the problems of overcrowding. In 1974 it was resolved that Tottenham Court Road would be ‘extensively modernized’, but because of economic and political difficulties the project was repeatedly delayed. Eventually in 1978–9 it came forward under the control of London Regional Transport’s in-house architects, with Duncan Lamb in charge. After further delays a revised scheme was prepared in 1981–2. It seems to have been the imaginative Lamb who was responsible for bringing in Eduardo Paolozzi to enliven the station surfaces with mosaics ‘related to the predominant hi-fi electronic shops of the area’. Compared to tamer schemes of the time at other Underground stations, this went down poorly with some London Transport officials. One who had only seen black and white drawings minuted: ‘The thought of such a monstrosity in colour appalls [sic] me. It most certainly does not, in my view, depict the Hi-Fi image of Tottenham Court Road, it is more in keeping with a street specializing in watches and clocks’.¹⁶

Nevertheless the Paolozzi scheme went ahead in stages between 1982 and 1986, to become an outstanding example of art patronage by London Transport. The brief evolved to cover not only the four platform walls but also the arches at the top of the escalators and various other surfaces with a total of 950 square metres of vividly coloured glass mosaic. Using his customary collage technique, Paolozzi transformed his chosen images in scale and hue by means of recent advances in colour photocopying and then applied the results to a model with help from an assistant, Ray Watson. Similar motifs were used for both lines, red tones taking priority on the Central Line platforms, black on the Northern Line ones, following London Transport’s colour code for the two lines. The subjects and local references are best described in Paolozzi’s own words:

In the final version geometry and music by oblique metaphor run through the scheme interrupted by the glimpse of a butterfly or a geared engine. Interwoven among these are saxophones, cameras, parts of computers and electronic equipment – all reflecting the rich urban life immediately above the station. An Egyptian panel will suggest not only the proximity of the British Museum but also the international nature of the tourists using Tottenham Court Road underground station. Anthropomorphic masks – half-engine, half-ethnographic – reflect many of the objects on sale in the streets above.¹⁷

The one drawback to the scheme is that it is hard to stand back from and take in, unlike the repetitive decoration on other Underground station platforms. The best place to see it is a small circular concourse at the bottom of the Central Line escalators, which is lined by a concentrated burst of mosaics.

Paolozzi's tour de force did nothing to allay the station's spatial inadequacies. These were highlighted by the King's Cross Underground fire of 1987, and the improved standards called for under the subsequent London Underground (Safety Measures) Act of 1991. Plans were also now in the offing for the new lines that came to be known as Crossrail 1 and 2; both were to pass through Tottenham Court Road, with Crossrail 1 far enough advanced for its enabling Bill to be considered by Parliament. London Underground Ltd therefore conferred with the City of Westminster with a view to rebuilding the whole Charing Cross Road–Oxford Street corner, including the Astoria Theatre in Charing Cross Road. In their brief of 1990, Westminster stipulated that any new building should include a replacement theatre for live performances. The authority also deprecated much demolition along Oxford Street, where Nos 1–53 had been added to the Soho Conservation Area in 1983.

A consortium of property interests brought forward a sketch-scheme for the above-ground elements of the reconstruction in 1990–1. Designed by Michael Hopkins & Partners, architects, this proposed an office building incorporating an elliptical toplit arcade in the centre and a small theatre to replace the Astoria at the curving corner facing St Giles' Circus. On the south side the building was to be bounded by Sutton Row, while on the north 1–23 Oxford Street were to be demolished. This scheme soon foundered on the basis of commercial viability. In any case the configuration of the new Crossrail station beneath had still to be decided; and Westminster might not have agreed at that date to so much demolition along Oxford Street.¹⁸

After many delays the Crossrail 1 Bill finally passed through Parliament in 2005, enabling preparations on the ground to start the next year, with the major works following on between 2009 and 2016. Such was the scale of the line (and with the prospect of the eventual Crossrail 2 also in mind) that not one but two new station concourses were planned for Tottenham Court Road, at either end of the lengthy platforms. On the existing station site, corresponding to the eastern end of the Crossrail platforms, all the above-ground buildings including the Astoria down to Sutton Row were cleared, but on Oxford Street only Nos 1–15 were at first demolished, retaining Nos 17–23 in accordance with Westminster's wishes. Later however Nos 17–25 were added to the holocaust of demolitions, after Westminster adopted more development-friendly policies in the 2010s.

A greatly enlarged station concourse was built in 2012–15 to plans detailed by Stanton Williams, architects, with Arups as engineers, allowing for a commercial superstructure to follow later. Above ground, the new entrances were marked by three freestanding pavilions, one at the Oxford Street corner, the two others in the lee of Centre Point. Below ground the work included displacing the Paolozzi mosaics over the former arches above the escalators, but after public protest these were transferred to

Edinburgh University, to join other works by the artist in the city of his birth; the rest of the mosaics, which had suffered in various ways since their installation, were partially restored. New art patronage was represented by bold geometrical designs flanking the entrance stairs and concourse by the French artist Daniel Buren.¹⁹

The western ticket hall and concourse followed on in 2014–17, on an entirely new site well to the west bounded by 91–101 Oxford Street, Great Chapel Street, Dean Street and Diadem Court, with the main entrance from Dean Street. Detailed by Hawkins Brown, architects, and taking its cue from Soho's connections with the film industry, this western concourse was given a 'dark and cinematic' treatment reflecting 'the nocturnal economies that characterize this area'. A sequence of digital artworks by Douglas Gordon has been planned for the escalator area.²⁰

Crossrail 1 has now been formally named as the Elizabeth Line and at the time of writing is scheduled to open in 2020. Meanwhile plans for Crossrail 2 are advancing, to pass through Tottenham Court Road in a north-south direction. The earliest completion date currently envisaged for this line is 2030.

Plans for the vacant building site behind the Oxford Street-Charing Cross Road corner were finally resolved in 2012, when Derwent London, a property company much involved with projects along the line of Crossrail 1, received planning permission to erect a very large development to be called Soho Place, to designs by Allford Hall Monaghan Morris, architects. Apart from the usual mixture of shops and offices, a small theatre will be incorporated on the Charing Cross Road side of the development, replacing the former Astoria, this having been consistently been among Westminster's conditions for any development here. The sites were made available to Derwent only after the main Crossrail 1 works had been completed in 2018, having by then been extended to take in 17–23 Oxford Street. At the time of writing foundation works are in train. Soho Place is

scheduled for completion in 2022. It will incorporate the Stanton Williams entrance to the eastern concourse of Tottenham Court Road Station at the corner of Oxford Street and Charing Cross Road.²¹

17–59 Oxford Street

The ordinary sequence of Oxford Street buildings now starts at No. 27, but this section of the chapter also records the history of Nos 17–23, demolished in 2018.

No. 17 was a diminutive creation, once of some quality but battered by heavy use and alterations over the years. It was a rare West End work by the architects Batterbury & Huxley, noted for their Hampstead studio houses. Built around 1885, it was commissioned by the artists' colourmen Kennedy & Brown, who advertised their new premises as a 'china painters' depot and general art store'. It included a small studio and gallery over the shop, behind the generous arch of the first-floor window. The front, in a discreet François Premier style, was of brick with Doulton terracotta dressings. The builder was Mark Manley and the modeller for the terracotta enrichments is recorded as Henry Pain of Highgate Road.²² Kennedy & Brown, latterly Kennedy & Francis, did not survive long. During the 1890s No. 17 was converted for the restaurant trade. From about 1903 it was a branch of H. Appenrodt, the successful German restaurateur and provision merchant of Coventry Street, who gave it a substantial refit in 1907.²³

Nos 19–27, of which only the frontage of Nos. 25–27 now survives, are unusually well-documented buildings, erected in 1908–10 as two separate developments by the partnership of Arthur Littlefield Hickman, a City-based developer, and Mark Bromet of Clerkenwell, builder, to the designs of Gilbert & Constanduros. They occupied shallow sites backing on to Falconberg Mews

(previously Sutton Place). These were among the freeholds bought in 1797 from the Portland Estate in Soho by Francis Glossop, who sold them in 1818 and 1823. In 1908 they were purchased by the Covent Garden fruiterers Michael, Lewis & Benjamin Jacobs. They promptly executed building agreements with Hickman & Bromet, who took an option to purchase the freeholds once they had completed the new buildings.

For Nos 19–23 a client was found for the ground floor in the shape of Cinematograph Theatres Ltd. This company, later Amalgamated Cinematograph Theatres, was the vehicle of Montagu Pyke, one of the pioneer London cinema proprietors. Gilbert & Constanduros proceeded to design quite a fancy front of Portland stone with pilasters through the upper storeys, a crowning open parapet and a wide flat arch with recessed tympanum at ground level right of centre to draw in audiences. The front's grandeur belied a tight auditorium turned sideways because of the shallow plot. Hickman & Bromet elected to take their profit and dispose of the freehold before the upper portions of the building were entirely let, as Pyke House. They found a taker in the Prudential Assurance Company, but the latter's agents, Horne & Co., beat down the high price asked, warning their clients that cinemas might well be a passing craze, and that 'when the lower part of this building is no longer required as a Theatre considerable alterations will be necessary to convert it into Shops or Offices'. So indeed it proved; despite a change of name from the Cinematograph Theatre to the Phoenix, the cinema closed in 1925, when new shopfronts were inserted.²⁴ The ground-floor frontispiece had been entirely changed long before Nos 19–23 were demolished in 2018.

Nos 25–27 belonged to the same development of 1908–10, but here Gilbert & Constanduros faced the front in Bath stone with a crowning central gable. Hickman & Bromet found a tenant for the shop in the shape of Liptons, the tea merchants, then keen to get a toehold in the Oxford Street market for tea shops, in which the Lyons chain were doing so well. Once again Horne &

Co. took a sceptical view of the price when the Prudential was invited to buy this freehold also. Liptons, they reported, were laying out £3,000 on fitting it up, but 'the enormous increase in Tea Shops in the last few years will not be justified by results, especially in such a position as this, and the lessee may be glad to take advantage of the first break in their lease to move out and cut their loss, when the rent will probably have to be considerably reduced'. The upper-floor offices here included a branch office of the Prudential.²⁵ At the time of writing this building was being totally redeveloped behind the old front but with a higher roofline by ESA Architecture on behalf of Emperor International Holdings of Hong Kong.²⁶

Nos 29–31 was designed by Gordon Jeeves, architect, and built in 1923–4. Its flat two-bay front, in terracotta simulating Portland stone, carries the implied giant classical order popular in urban shops and offices at that date, with tiers of windows between the piers of the middle storeys.²⁷

Nos 33 and 35 are a pair of narrow-fronted buildings topped off by ornamental Queen Anne gables. They are surprisingly late for their style. The stone-faced No. 33, designed by E. Keynes Purchase, dates from 1907; the more florid No. 35, by Gilbert & Constanduros and faced in terracotta, seems to have followed quickly on.²⁸

Nos 37–39 is a typical example of the kind of trabeated and stone-fronted classical building designed for London shops and offices just before and after the First World War. It was built by Ford & Walton in 1912–13 to designs by the prolific Delissa Joseph. Among the first tenants of the offices was the Trans-Atlantic Film Company, European agents for the Universal Film Manufacturing Company of America.²⁹

No. 41, like most of its eastern neighbours, is a rebuilding from the years before the First World War, in this case 1910. Its architect, F. E. Williams, had Arts and Crafts proclivities, which may account for the Tudor style, with leaded lights (all now removed) and a pitched roof running from front to back (an eccentricity in Oxford Street) – all over steel-frame construction. The builder and owner was J. W. Lorden.³⁰

No. 43 is one of the two buildings along this frontage with a pre-Victorian pedigree. Before the renumbering of 1881 it was No. 420, and can probably be identified with the house occupied c.1830 by Samuel Shelverton's Alderney Barn Dairy (see above). Tallis's street view shows this and its then eastern neighbour No. 421 as a pair, of four full storeys above ground as now, and with the blank-arched first-floor window surrounds typical of the 1820s, which could be the date of the carcass. The front may first have been stuccoed in Victorian times, but the present consoled window surrounds appear to date from 2014. For some years from 1905 this was the London base of the bentwood furniture manufacturers Thonet Brothers; and in 1911 there was a very short-lived cinema, the Murie-Aeroplane Cinematograph Hall, at this address.³¹

Nos 45–49 constitute a short run of houses dating from 1872–3, as the proportions and style of their fronts betray. Their architect was Henry Baker as surveyor to the Glossop Estate, the freeholders here, and their builder was probably Cullum; some faults were found in their construction, which had to be put right. Paint has been unfortunately applied to all three fronts, originally of fair-faced brickwork. Since about 1832, well before the rebuilding, No. 45 (previously 418) had been the headquarters of the truss and surgical instrument maker William Huntley Bailey, and the successor firm of W. H. Bailey & Son continued on there in the rebuilt premises, though there was a period in the early twentieth century when the ground floor was a

restaurant. In about 1923 they moved back down into the shop, which they reconstructed with some elegance and had photographed. Nos 47 & 49 for some years from 1910 housed a branch of J. Lyons, then afterwards an office of the Hearts of Oak Permanent Building Society.³²

No. 51 (formerly 415) is the other pre-Victorian survival along this frontage, but like No. 43 has been stuccoed at an uncertain date and retains little surviving early character. It can be identified with the four-storey building shown by Tallis, then the shop of a short-lived firm of linen drapers and hosiers.

No. 53 was the site of a pub from early Georgian times till about 1960. Here stood the Man Loaded with Mischief whose famous sign is discussed above. It seems to have been rebuilt as the Primrose in 1890 to designs by Edward Clark, and that is probably the red brick building there today. Confusingly, the date 1900 appears just below the gable: that was when the pub was taken over by Gerald Mooney's Dublin brewery and again renamed, this time as the Shamrock.³³

Nos 55-59 is an architecturally competent stone-faced building of 1929 devoted to shops and offices, with five main storeys, end pavilions, an inset arch in the centre of the Oxford Street elevation and a return front to Soho Street. The architect was William Doddington and the client the shipowner and property tycoon Sir John Ellerman. In 1950 the shoe chain Dolcis inserted one of its interesting post-war shops on the corner site (Nos 57-59), to designs by its in-house architect Ellis E. Somake and his assistant Rodney W. Freeborn. This was a men's shop only, with the ground floor limited to an 'impulse sales area' and a larger selling space below in the basement carrying more stock.³⁴