

Chapter 17

161–195 Oxford Street

Poland Street to Ramillies Street

The shadow of the lost Pantheon, a graceful anomaly amidst the banality of Georgian Oxford Street, dominates the history of this long block. Such is its importance that it is covered separately in the next chapter. The present Marks & Spencer store covers its site and does its best to compensate for the Pantheon's demolition in 1937. Otherwise the architecture is the usual jumble of buildings dating from the 1880s onwards, many reconditioned or replaced following enemy action in the Second World War. The most interesting is No. 181, a fragment from a once-bumptious composition by Colcutt. The former No. 165, opened in 1906 as Hale's Tours of the World, later the Academy Cinema, holds a hallowed place in the annals of British cinema.

The ownership history of Nos 161–167 is given in the previous chapter. That of the land from No. 169 westwards to Oxford Circus is fully set out in Volume 31 of the *Survey of London*. In brief, Tyburn Road here formed the northern boundary of a large close called Millfield, which was in the freehold ownership of the Maddox family for most of the seventeenth century. Their heirs, Benjamin and John Pollen, sold off about half this land piecemeal in 1732–3, including the eastern end of the northern frontage. By then it had been built up, as may be seen by comparing the two editions of Blome's map of St James's parish (c.1689 and c.1720). The former shows pasture land extending from Berwick Street to the present site of Oxford Circus, whereas by 1720 there were buildings along the Oxford Street

frontage and both sides of the new Great Marlborough Street, with Marlborough Mews in between the two. Blenheim Street (renamed Ramillies Street in 1885) had also been laid out, but was little more than a cross street between Oxford and Great Marlborough Streets. Most of this development took place from 1704 onwards, as may be gathered from the street names, which commemorate British military victories of that year.¹

Buildings and occupants before 1880

Of the first-generation houses along this strip the earliest was the King of Poland pub, built with a 17ft frontage on the site of the present No. 161 (formerly 365), in other words the western corner with Poland Street, and part of James Pollett's development of Little Gelding's Close, the close next east to Millfield. The original 51-year lease of this pub dated from 1690, and was from Pollett to William Barber of St James's, bricklayer. By 1749 its name had changed to the Wheatsheaf, and it remained as a pub till it was destroyed by bombing in 1940.²

After the next house west, between the old Nos 363 and 364, came a short cul-de-sac marked on Rocque's map as Poland Yard but later known as Harris or Harris's Place. This alley was probably developed at the same time as 34-37 Poland Street, the backs of which formed its east side. There were just four small houses on its west side, with tight winding stairs like those of the Poland Street houses opposite. At No. 2 the watercolourist John Varley lived for a while from 1801 at the time of his early fame and influence; here John Linnell and William Mulready came as his pupils.³

A little further west, next door to the Pantheon, the former No. 360 (later 171) was from the early 1780s the premises and home of the carver, gilder and frame-maker Edward Wyatt. A trade card from the early years of his occupation undertakes to supply 'Looking Glasses, Girandoles, Bordering for Rooms &c. in the newest taste'. A cousin of James Wyatt,

architect to the Pantheon, Edward Wyatt may have acquired his premises through the relationship. He became among the most sought-after of Regency carvers, working at Windsor, Carlton House and many other places. He was also a good businessman, investing inter alia in property at the far western end of Oxford Street on the future Selfridges site. After he retired in the 1820s his son, also Edward Wyatt, kept the business on at No. 360 until his death in 1860. Subsequently the premises became Inman's Restaurant. This was taken over by the Vanoni family in the 1890s and known in the Edwardian period as the Café Marguerite.⁴

Other high-class tradesmen occupied this part of Oxford Street, clustering around the Pantheon. In 1786 Frederick Richman, hatter, hosier and 'masquerade warehouseman to his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales' announced the opening of his shop at No. 361, stocked with 'elegant dresses ... dominos and character dresses, and a great assortment of his silk masks, so greatly approved of'.⁵ The Georgian cabinet-maker and upholsterer Thomas Eyre and other members of his family are recorded at No. 356 (later 181) at dates between 1773 and 1814.⁶ For the china and glass shop of the Phillips family, at Nos 358 and 359 (later 175 and 177) see below. Besides the Wheatsheaf there were two further pubs or eating houses, the Crown at No. 356 bis (later 183) and the King's Arms at No. 353 (later 189).⁷

The latter was supplanted by Oxenham's auction rooms. The Oxenham family business began with Hugh Oxenham, inventor of a portable mangle, patented in 1774 some years after the firm began. Their original shop was in Carnaby Market, whence they moved first to 342 and then to 354 Oxford Street. There they advertised themselves in 1792-3 as mangle-makers to the Prince of Wales, claiming that theirs was the original and only genuine portable mangle, all others being spurious copies. By the end of the century they were also selling water closets, presses and butterchurns.⁸ Soon after that they were describing themselves as Oxenham & Co. or T[homas] Oxenham & Son, upholsterers and cabinetmakers as well

as mangle makers. By 1816 the firm was called John Thomas Oxenham & Eddy, while next door at No. 353 was Samuel Oxenham, auctioneer and appraiser. In the next generation the auctioneers, now Hugh and Henry Oxenham, took over both premises. Oxenhams continued at these addresses, later Nos 187 and 189, under various managements till the 1880s, when the firm of Tooth & Tooth assumed the business; retaining the old name, they continued there until the Second World War. Many memorable auctions took place here, such as the costumes and props from the celebrated Eglinton Tournament in 1840.⁹

Academy House and Academy Cinema, 161–167 Oxford Street

The present block of shops and offices here dates in carcass from 1989–90, but was heightened and wholly refaced in 2016–17. The western half of this site had previously been occupied by the well-known Academy Cinema, itself the replacement of a primitive early cinema at No. 165 going back to 1906.

The original picture house here began as the first British outlet for Hale's Tours of the World. The concept, invented by the Americans George C. Hale and William Keefe and first presented at the St Louis International Exhibition of 1904, was to build on the funfair tradition of phantom rides by projecting a series of moving images showing a train ride which the audience viewed from an enclosed platform as if they were passengers. Noises and a rocking motion were added to increase verisimilitude. The franchise for this invention was owned at the outset by the Anglo-American producer Charles Urban, a significant figure in early British film, but soon sold on to a consortium led by J. Henry Iles, who opened further venues for Hale's Tours of the World in other British cities.¹⁰

Space was created for the display by the expedient of cutting out the ground storey of the four small houses on the west side of Harris Place so as

to create a long and narrow north-south 'hall' containing the pseudo-railway carriage and seating 65. A paybox stood at the head of the alley, which had evidently been closed to public access. The attraction encountered some difficulties with the licensing authorities, and shut for good in 1910 when the freeholder of Harris Place announced that it was to be redeveloped.¹¹

At this juncture Harris Place along with 34–37 Poland Street had probably just been bought by Mark Bromet, the builder who was then completing a speculation further east at 19–27 Oxford Street, including the Cinematograph Theatre. Here Bromet, with capital support this time from Arthur Stanley, MP, repeated the pattern, projecting an office block and a cinema behind with classical Portland stone façades, to designs by Gilbert & Constanduros, architects. In this case the site was substantially deeper, with a good return front to Poland Street behind Nos 161 and 163 at the corner. So two fronts were possible, one facing Oxford Street with entrances to the cinema at No. 165 and to the offices (Poland House) at No. 167, and the other towards Poland Street, conceived as a modelled screen wall with emergency exits for the cinema. The Oxford Street front to the office block was seven storeys high, divided vertically by tripartite windows and piers.¹²

Big enough to hold some 600 seats and include a small circle as well as stalls, the Picture House (as it was called) opened in January 1913 after over two years of negotiation and construction. The original manager was Walter Hyman, well known in the cinema world of the time, representing a newly formed company called Polandus Ltd. The interior was lavish for its date. A deep, mosaic-paved lobby from the Oxford Street entrance led to a small crush hall with a semi-circle of scagliola columns. Hence a balustraded marble staircase to the left led up to the circle. In the auditorium a mahogany dado was surmounted by 'exquisitely panelled paintings of seventeenth century figures' set against a cream and gold ground. The first showing was of *The Miracle*, a colour film with score by Engelbert Humperdinck; to add

atmosphere, the management erected 'convent and cathedral gates in uralite stone, extending across the entire circle. With its doors, steps, towers, and windows, this grey entrance, 60 feet wide and 45 feet high, looks as though it had been taken bodily from some mediaeval German city'.¹³

Until the advent of the talkies the Picture House remained under Polandus Ltd, itself a subsidiary of Grand Centrals Ltd and then of Cinema House Ltd, based at 225 Oxford Street. Between 1916 and 1928 minor alterations were made to designs by Peter Dollar, architect. In the latter year the name was changed to the Academy Picture House, soon afterwards simply the Academy Cinema. Then in 1929–30 the architect Leslie H. Kemp undertook further changes to equip the house for sound. The proprietor remained Cinema House Ltd, but from 1931 management passed to a young Anglo-Armenian producer, Eric Hakim, and programming to Elsie Cohen. Under Cohen the Academy gained its niche as an art-house cinema, showing the latest and best non-English-language films from European countries.¹⁴ In 1933 it could be said:

Everyone knows the Academy Cinema. When we say Academy, it is as often as not (and how shocked our grandfathers would be to hear it) that one we mean. It is more than a cinema: it is a policy, a promise, a guarantee. Something one has in common with other people, a topic of conversation, a means of making friends.¹⁵

In 1937 the cinema's ownership passed to Academy Cinema Ltd, a company controlled by Basil Burton and members of his family. The programming policies remained unchanged. The same war damage which put paid to Nos 161 and 163 at the Poland Street corner closed the Academy in 1940. It reopened with limited facilities in 1944 under the management of the Austrian émigré and film producer George Hoellering, who became a director of Academy Cinema Ltd and gradually took complete control of the company, seconded by his stepson, Ivo Jarosy. The refurbishment was supervised by Alister MacDonald, architect, who went on with his assistant

and later partner Edward Jamilly to make significant post-war changes to the Academy in phases.¹⁶

The first concerned the basement, which had been in separate but intermittent use since the mid 1930s as a restaurant or ballroom. In 1947 MacDonald and the émigré graphic designer F. H. K. Henrion recast it as the Academy Exhibition Hall. Here the Institute of Contemporary Arts held its first exhibition early in 1948. This lasted only briefly.¹⁷

The cinema followed on in 1953–4. This time MacDonald and Jamilly, no doubt on Hoellering's suggestion, were supplemented for the interior by the Soho photographer and eccentric Angus McBean, who had worked with Hoellering in connection with the film version of Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*. His brief was to endow the Academy 'with an atmosphere of richness and intimacy ... as opposed to the somewhat impersonal atmosphere of the chain cinema'. To achieve this McBean opted for a camp, anti-modern style dubbed in retrospect by Jonathan Meades as 'Festival of Britain Directoire'. Beyond a new scalloped sheet-metal canopy over the entrance, the foyers were opened up and fussily decorated. The old green-and-white marble staircase was spruced up with an antique candelabrum, while the auditorium acquired neo-Victorian theatrical finishes and a hand-blocked Empire festooned wallpaper in crimson.¹⁸

In the next phase, McBean and collaborators were employed to convert the basement into the Marquee Ballroom, after 1958 the Marquee Club. Then, Academy Cinema Ltd was able to expand into the new building built on the next-door sites at 161 and 163 Oxford Street. In about 1956 MacDonald and Jamilly made a second entrance at No. 163, leading by way of a foyer and spindly staircase to a first-floor 'coffee lounge' or Hungarian tearoom at the corner with Poland Street. More familiar in its second incarnation as the Pavilion Restaurant, this became McBean's coup de grace, tricked out like a tent room in Malmaison style, complete with striped awnings and fake fluted columns to hide the building's construction. All this was done on the cheap;

for instance, gilded ashtrays from Woolworths were used as pseudo-drip trays for the wall sconces. In rebellion against the austere taste of the times, McBean enjoyed creating a parallel collage image of the interior peopled with surreal, dressed-up clients, all with the face of his partner, David Ball.¹⁹

Under George Hoellering and Ivo Jarosy, the Academy enhanced its reputation as London's premier art-house cinema, its features regularly advertised from 1947 onwards by an exclusive series of woodcut or linocut posters designed by the German-born artist, Peter Strausfeld. It was subdivided into smaller auditoria in two stages in 1964-7 (David Dry, architect); one of the screens in the basement supplanted the Marquee Club, which moved to Wardour Street.²⁰ By the time of Hoellering's death in 1980 attendances were in decline, but the cinemas were kept going by Jarosy, subsidised by rents from the adjacent offices.²¹ Operations closed in 1986. The restaurant survived a few years longer, until the whole site was cleared in 1989. A few fragments from the Pavilion Restaurant, notably the chairs, may still be seen at the premises of its successor, Vasco and Piero's Restaurant, 15 Poland Street.

The present Academy House, a standard block of shops and offices, occupies the former site of the cinema and Poland House at Nos 165-167 plus the corner site with Poland Street, Nos 161-163. Designed by the architects Sheppard Robson and built in 1989-90, it was clad in panels of Jura limestone over a granite base and relied for its effect on a strong corner emphasis. In 2016-17 it was radically reworked with extra recessed storeys on top, to designs by John Robertson Architects. The original client for the refurbishment was Aviva Investors, but the block was sold during the planning stage to the property arm of Sports Direct. The new façades feature an increased proportion of shop window and cladding in blue faience. The ornamental gateway on the Poland Street front was designed by the artist Catherine Bertola.²²

Marks & Spencer, Pantheon branch

The celebrated Pantheon (1772–1937) is separately covered in the next chapter. Its site, fronting Oxford Street and carrying through to Poland Street at the side and Great Marlborough Street at the back, is occupied today by the best-known London outlet of the Marks & Spencer chain, familiar for its distinctive polished black frontispiece. The store was constructed in 1938 by Bovis Ltd to designs prepared by W. A. Lewis & Partners in collaboration with Robert Lutyens. It originally covered just the Oxford Street frontage of the Pantheon site, numbered 173 after 1880, together with the premises behind, but was extended eastwards in 1962–3 to take in the sites of Nos 169–171.

Marks & Spencer opened their first West End branch at Orchard House, 454–464 Oxford Street near Marble Arch, in 1930. The decision to establish a larger store in the West End confirmed the success of the earlier enterprise and the energetic pace of the firm's expansion. In 1916, Simon Marks took the helm of the company co-founded by his father and set about improving the business to fend off competitors such as Woolworth. Marks travelled to the United States in 1924 to study retail practices in chain stores, and returned with an insight into 'the value of more imposing, commodious premises', modernised administration and counter footage.²³ The public flotation of the company in 1926 generated funds for the construction of new stores. By the beginning of the Second World War, the company had built or rebuilt 218 shops and extended approximately 200 more. The Pantheon store was set apart from its contemporaries by its size, superior location and sophistication. One of its architects later recalled that it was 'the store to outstore all stores, and the amounts involved in the acquisition of the site and the building were, by comparison with the stores which had already been erected, quite astronomical'.²⁴

The task of designing this prominent store was entrusted to Lewis & Partners (later Lewis & Hickey), the architectural firm largely responsible for work in the south of England for Marks & Spencer. The building process was overseen by Ernest E. Shrewsbury, the head of its building department. Lewis & Partners also worked in collaboration with Robert Lutyens, who was appointed consultant architect to the company in 1934. He devised a standardised system for the street elevations of stores, which were faced with square artificial-stone tiles based on a ten-inch module to ensure uniformity and coherence. This inventive approach was applied to frontages of any size, including extensions. The application of polished black granite to the Pantheon and Leeds stores signalled their prestige and imitated the glamour of West End blocks such as the National Radiator Building (Ideal House) in Great Marlborough Street, Drages, and the Odeon Cinema in Leicester Square.²⁵

The original store occupied the full site of the former Pantheon, reaching south to Great Marlborough Street and east to Poland Street. Lewis & Partners had produced plans for a three-storey north range fronting Oxford Street in 1936, but these were supplanted by a more ambitious scheme with a showy arcade. A four-storey block faced with shiny black granite was devised for the north front. The sleek façade was composed of five bays, with square first-floor windows set among chequer-work panels and three embrasures above containing tall Crittall windows and flat paterae. The composition was crowned by a plain parapet with green neon lettering. The ground floor incorporated an arcaded shopfront executed by Holttum & Green of Holloway. This was lined with Bianca del Mare marble and furnished with gilded bronze display cases, including a central freestanding showcase. Two-storey ranges facing Great Marlborough Street and Poland Street were more modest in scale and quality of materials, being faced with glazed terracotta tiles. The east frontage initially comprised 39 and 41 Poland Street, its regularity interrupted by a pre-existing front at No. 40. The remainder of the

site was occupied by a single-storey range which provided nearly 22,000 square feet of retail space.²⁶

After the Pantheon branch opened in October 1938, an article in a trade magazine remarked that it was 'designed and equipped on lavish lines', incorporating features more commonly found in department stores.²⁷ The ground floor was devoted to sales, with approximately 2,200 feet of counter displays, garment rails and wall racks in an open-plan arrangement. The main retail departments were food, clothing, millinery, footwear and household goods. Extravagant decorative finishes included walnut counters and wall panelling, coffered ceilings and oak block floors laid in a basket weave pattern. Specialist technology in the store included a clock with a signalling system for managerial staff and pillars capped by aluminium light reflectors and grilles for heating and ventilation. A café at the back of the shop adopted a bold, streamlined style based on Wanamaker's luncheonette in Philadelphia, with curved bars encircled by tall fixed stools with red-leather upholstery. A ladies' writing and rest room was located on the first floor, with an adjoining lavatory and attendants' office. The store also provided amenities for the welfare and training of nearly 300 employees, who included an interpreter for seven languages. The upper floors of the north range contained offices, a training room, comfortably arrayed rest rooms, and a canteen serving meals at low prices. The basement contained stock rooms with air-conditioned stores for foodstuffs and a loading bay in Great Marlborough Street.²⁸

In 1951 Marks & Spencer expanded eastwards into the basement and ground floor of 169–171 Oxford Street. This six-storey speculative block had been built in 1934 by James Carmichael Ltd to designs by Morris de Metz, replacing Vanoni's restaurant and a shop. It had been mainly occupied from 1935 by Associated Talking Pictures Ltd, for whom the cinema architect George Coles made alterations, but the shop below had been in separate occupation.²⁹

By this time, Marks & Spencer had expanded its catering provision for customers with tea and sandwich bars, ice cream counters, and a large self-service cafeteria with seating for 260 people. These additions probably compensated for the shortage of clothing during rationing. After the acquisition of the adjoining property, openings in the party wall were formed to extend the ground-floor shopping area and the basement stock rooms. Additional shopping space was formed by clearing the arcade shopfronts at both premises, restricting the main entrance to narrow lobbies flanked by display cases.

In 1962–3 the eastern extension at Nos 169–171 was rebuilt to secure a continuous street front for the enlarged store. The black granite façade of the original store was extended east by four bays, creating a symmetrical and uniform composition that attested to the adaptability of Lutyens's modular system. A new shopfront comprised two recessed public entrances flanked by display cases, which admitted customers into an extensive and open-plan shop. The east front was also extended southwards to include 42–43 Poland Street.³⁰

The area devoted to retail space at the Pantheon store was tripled by a series of extensions in the 1970s. Lewis & Hickey oversaw a first-floor extension and the rebuilding of the rear of the store in 1971–2. A substantial five-storey range fronting Great Marlborough Street was constructed with irregular fenestration, grey-slate cladding interspersed with raised brown-brick panels, and a steep mansard roof. Public staircases, lifts and escalators on the ground floor ascended to a first-floor sales floor, with an adjoining stock room positioned in the north range. A basement sales floor opened in 1978, increasing the retail space to 93,100 square feet arranged over three main floors. Around this time, the east front in Poland Street was rebuilt on an extended footprint to similar designs prepared by Lewis & Hickey, with a robust brown-brick and grey-slate elevation. The addition of a second-floor

sales area followed. Successive refurbishments of the interior have left no original features behind the black granite front.³¹

Gilbeys

The firm of W. & A. Gilbey, wine, spirit and liqueur importers and distillers, was founded in 1857 by two brothers, Walter and Alfred Gilbey, after their return from the Crimean War. As their elder brother Henry Parry Gilbey was already in the wine trade, on his advice they took over a basement just west of Berwick Street at 372 (later 147) Oxford Street and wrote to *The Times*, advertising the merits of South African wine. Within a year they had shifted to larger premises at No. 357 (later 179) just west of the Pantheon Bazaar. By 1860 they claimed a connection 'extending to 18,000 families, and upwards of 30 of the Chief Hospitals, Military Messes and Public Institutions', and were hiring cellarage under the Princess's Theatre opposite.³²

Further expansion immediately followed. Profiting from Gladstone's reduction of tariffs on French wines, in 1860-1 the brothers simultaneously opened a further large store in Great Titchfield Street close by to the north, and rebuilt their own offices at No. 357. Both were early works by the architect Thomas Harris. The Oxford Street building, though small and narrow, was an essay in Harris's architectural theory of 'angularity' - basically a wilful form of High Victorian Gothic, faced in stone on the ground storey and ornamental brickwork on the two levels above.³³ Then in 1867 Gilbeys made their biggest move yet, when they took over the whole of the defunct Pantheon Bazaar, using the front for their offices and the vaults and rooms behind as yet another of their stores. At that point No. 357 was given over to Gilbeys' neighbours, the china merchants Phillips, who rebuilt the premises a decade later (see below).

From 1869 Gilbeys started to develop further storage and bottling plants in Camden Town, which by the late 1880s was the centre of their commercial operations. But Oxford Street remained the flagship of their empire until they sold the Pantheon to Marks & Spencer in 1937.

Phillips and Duveen's shops, 175–181 Oxford Street

The founding date of the firm of George Phillips, china and glass dealer, is traditionally given as 1782. Certainly Phillips was trading as a 'pot seller' two years later, at old 135 Oxford Street on the present-day John Lewis site. Phillips and his wife Elizabeth (whose portrait was drawn by John Linnell) were Baptists. The business prospered, so in about 1806 they moved to a double shop at Nos 358 and 359 (later 175–177), the properties next west of the Pantheon, perhaps taking over from another 'Staffordshire warehouseman', William Carr, who had premises at No. 359 in 1784 and 1794. Phillips died in 1813, leaving the business to his sons Jacob and Jonathan.³⁴

Subsequently the firm was known as J. Phillips, and after Jonathan Phillips's death in 1852 as W. P. & G. Phillips, 'designers and producers' of china and earthenware as well as dealers.³⁵ There had probably always been a manufacturing link with the Potteries district, as Elizabeth Phillips had retired to Hanley. But increasingly the firm became identified with art pottery. There is a full description of the Oxford Street shop and 'studio' by the American art-journalist, Susan N. Carter, in 1879, just before rebuilding. In the shop she describes winding 'in and out among the long tables and counters', covered with German lustre glass, English cut glass, Doulton ware, and pottery from Sèvres, Gien and many other places. Then she visits the studio at the back, painted olive-green, plainly carpeted, divided by a few Japanese screens and hung with 'a few plaques of lovely designs and colours, that serve as standards and guides to the decorators'. Here the

superintendent, Mr Eyre, presides over ten to a dozen 'ladies' sitting at a black table painting designs on pots, while another is finishing a pot on a wheel. 'The room and its occupants', says Carter, 'appeared to belong rather to some retiring teacher and his pupils than to a great house in the pottery trade.' Some of the ladies, she was informed, 'were, at the time of our visit, in the country, making studies of flowers, fruit, and birds, and later they would use these studies as original designs for their decorations'.³⁶

By then the Phillips firm occupied three properties, having in the late 1860s purchased Gilbeys' former headquarters at No. 357 (later 179) to add to Nos 358 and 359. Though less than twenty years old (see above), that building must have looked perverse and outdated by the time the Phillipses and their architect, T. E. Collcutt, set about reconstructing their premises.

The sequence of events relating to this campaign is hard to be sure of, as the main evidence comes from a memoir written long afterwards, relating its history at second hand.³⁷ But before the end of 1879 the Phillipses had probably decided to rebuild No. 357, with the intention of using the upper floors while letting off the shop below to a tenant. Whether this was part of a programme involving the long-term reconstruction of their whole premises or a stand-alone job does not appear, but it seems to have been the Phillipses who brought in Collcutt, a rising star in metropolitan architecture.

As tenant for the shop and perhaps also for a flat on the top floors the art-dealer Joseph Joel Duveen now entered the picture. Dutch-born, father of the famous Joseph, Lord Duveen, and equally dynamic and celebrated as a dealer in his day, he had then been in London only two years. As a young man in Hull during the 1860s, he had built up a business there importing china, tapestries and paintings mainly from Holland, before taking space in Soho in 1877. Duveen had hoped to install himself in the more fashionable western sector of Oxford Street between Oxford Circus and Marble Arch, but he could not find suitable premises there, and turned

down several places in Bond Street as 'far too small'. Oxford Street remained his goal, however. On securing his agreement with the Phillipses he hastened to acquire an entirely fresh stock, purchased chiefly from Messrs Lowengard in Paris, together with choice items from Belgium and Holland.³⁸

The new No. 357 – or No. 181, as it became while in construction – was erected as an independent entity in 1880–1. Duveen described himself at length in the directories as an 'importer of antique china, silver and decorative works of art, statuary, tapestries, antique furniture, cabinets, mirrors, ancient musical clocks, &c &c'.³⁹ After a shaky start his 'galleries' established themselves with *éclat* on the ground and first floors. The original design for the front is uncertain, since it was altered twice, once during construction and again in 1885. With the display of art-objects in mind, Duveen had wanted a projecting bay spanning the whole first-floor frontage. It was to be of timber, and therefore illegal under the building regulations governing projections. It appears to have been constructed but then removed under the threat of prosecution, leaving the premises with an entirely flat front.⁴⁰ Its removal left Duveen dissatisfied. So in 1885 he resolved to cut out the whole first-floor brickwork and replace it with a wide plate-glass window to better command the attention of passers-by. According to Duveen's nephew Jack, Collcutt (mistranscribed in his memoir as 'Mr. Cockshott') was upset by this, as he felt the window's large proportions would spoil the small-scale Flemish details of the front, and proposed a compromise which was duly set out in framework for Duveen's approval. Years later, Collcutt and Jack Duveen met while 'travelling on a steamer from Monaco to Genoa', and the architect told him this story:

I was just inspecting the work when I heard a roar behind me. I saw Duveen, and before I could interfere he made a rush at the woodwork and kicked it to pieces. "You call that almost invisible!" he bellowed at me, as he completed the destruction. Then he rushed off to see Mr. Phillips. The end of it was that

he had his way, and I had to leave this yawning semicircle to spoil the effect of my front. But when the building was finished and he made his first evening display it was indeed the talk of the town. He had placed a beautiful Louis XV lacquer and ormolu commode in the centre with a large gilt clock on it, with two candelabra to match, and as background a fourfold screen decorated with scenes by Watteau. On the second night I went to see the show myself, and there were crowds of people on the opposite pavement to look at the strongly illuminated sight. Hardly any carriage passed by without stopping, and I realized that this man whom I had looked upon as a brutal ignoramus had exquisite taste and that I had been wrong.⁴¹

The essence of the anecdote is corroborated by official minutes approving the change, as well as an 1885 photograph by Bedford Lemere showing the altered front together with the adjoining new premises of the Phillipses.⁴²

As to the latter, it appears that the decision to rebuild the contiguous Phillips shop stemmed from a serious fire in May 1884 (Jack Duveen misdates this to 1883), when a complete five-floor warehouse at the back of the premises towards Blenheim Mews (now Ramillies Place) was burnt out.⁴³ Collcutt therefore returned to the job and rebuilt Nos 175–179 in the same florid style as No. 181, while altering the latter as explained above for Duveen, who now took over all the upper floors of the enlarged building for his expanding business and family. The contractors for this second campaign, completed in 1885, were J. & J. Greenwood, and the ample terracotta dressings were supplied by Doultons, with modelling by J. E. Knox and Walter Smith.⁴⁴

The completed Nos 175–181 constituted a landmark both in Collcutt's career and in the spread of the Queen Anne style in commercial architecture. The closest precedent was Ernest George & Peto's design for the china and glass shop of Thomas Goode in South Audley Street. But with their rippling high gables, their asymmetry, their robust red brickwork set off by friezes of modelled terracotta and the four-storey bay right down the

centre of Nos 175–179 flanked by pots in niches, the Phillips–Duveen premises went one better in scale, pomp and ornamentation. Their Low-Countries flavour suited Duveen’s milieu to perfection.

Yet neither firm stayed for long in Oxford Street after the rebuilding. Phillips moved their main shop to Mount Street, Mayfair, in 1898, while maintaining a secondary branch in New Bond Street. Duveen was even faster off the mark. ‘By the end of the 1880s’, recalled his nephew, ‘Joel Duveen realized that a change from Oxford Street to Old Bond Street was essential’, and he accordingly made the switch in 1893.⁴⁵ In his stead, No. 181 was immediately taken over as the newly established London branch of the Liverpool-based furniture makers and upholsterers S. J. Waring & Sons. A photograph of 1895 depicts a showroom at No. 181 fitted out in antiquarian Elizabethan or Jacobean polished oak – one of the English styles purveyed by Warings, and at odds with the continental sophistication of the Duveens.⁴⁶

The history of Waring & Gillow, the successor firm to S. J. Waring & Sons, is given on pages xxx. Suffice it to say here that they took over Nos 175–179 also immediately after Phillips left, making considerable changes.⁴⁷ The Colcutt buildings remained the centre of this booming firm’s operations until Samuel Waring junior opened his monumental store on the opposite side of the road at Nos 164–182 in 1906. Even then the Waring & Gillow estate agency business stayed on at No. 181 for some years.⁴⁸

The subsequent history of the sites has been inglorious. Nos 175–179 were much altered in 1929, then again in 1938, and badly bomb-damaged not long afterwards. They were demolished and replaced in about 1948 by a dour concrete building designed by Dowton & Hurst, architects, for Swears & Wells.⁴⁹ Following a fire in 2007, that in turn gave way to the present building on this site, a compact block of shops and offices built to designs by the architects 3D Reid for the National Farmers Union Mutual Insurance Society in 2009–10. The five-storey front features panels alternating

stonework and glass which step back at a slant from the front.⁵⁰ Next door, No. 181 survives but with paintwork sloped over its brick and dainty terracotta details.

Other sites

Nos 183 and 185 are a pair of lively though battered late Victorian fronts which combine well with No. 181. The former had been the Crown pub and appears to be a rebuilding of 1885–6 for Pownceby & Co., wine merchants.⁵¹ A perky mini-dome tops off the composition. The latter is dated 1895 and retains its brickwork and terracotta unpainted. It was first used after the date of erection by J. Lyons & Co., so can probably be attributed to that firm's in-house architects.⁵²

Nos 187–195, on the former Oxenham Auction rooms site plus that of some extra houses westwards, takes up the rest of this block as far as the steps leading down to Ramillies Street. All these sites were cleared following Second World War bombing. A large and plain block of shops and offices was rebuilt here in 1956–7 to designs by C. Edmund Wilford & Son, working for Willson's (London & Provinces) Ltd. The shop was taken by the drapers Penberthys, ousted from Nos 388–396 at the other end of Oxford Street, where Willson's was undertaking another development. The upper storeys were let initially to Granada Theatres Ltd.⁵³ More recently the block came into the possession of Boots Ltd, who commissioned the architects Future Systems to give the upper storeys a flashy make-over in the form of diamond-faceted glass bays in 2007–8.⁵⁴