

# Chapter 19

## 197–235 Oxford Street

### Ramillies Street to Argyll Street

This chapter covers two blocks of buildings, from Ramillies Street to Hills Place and thereon westwards to Argyll Street. Oxford Street's architecture is particularly disappointing here. Apart from the Central London Railway station and offices of 1900–4 at the Argyll Street corner (covered separately in the Oxford Circus chapter) and Nos 221–223 (of 1914), the whole frontage is of post-war or twenty-first-century vintage. Previous buildings along this stretch of the street, numbered 336 to 350 from west to east up until 1880 were architecturally unremarkable. But several in the Ramillies Street to Hills Place block played a lively role in the Oxford Street catering industry, while the history of No. 225 just west of Hills Place is unusually rich. The two blocks' first development coincided with the making of the Great Marlborough Street area after 1704 on part of Millfield Close (see Chapter 17).

#### *Ramillies Street to Hills Place*

Ramillies Street, known as Blenheim Street before 1885, lay at a level well below Oxford Street, and so culminated at its north end in a stairway formerly called Blenheim Steps, often cited as a landmark in the street's repetitive topography. At the other end of the block is the narrow Hills (sometimes Hill's) Place, called Queen Street until 1866. Connecting only

with Ramillies Place (formerly Marlborough Mews) at the back, it is a virtual cul-de-sac.

Horwood depicts the block in the 1790s as in two rows, Nos 340–343 at the western end, and the longer Nos 344–350 further east. Between them an entry led to a large stable yard at the back. As often there was a pub beside this entry, the Nag's Head at No. 343, which lent its name to the yard.<sup>1</sup> By the time of Tallis's guide (c.1839) the entry had been suppressed and vehicle access to Nag's Head Yard was from the mews at the back. Tallis and later directories show that the numbering in this block and the next block west had become confused, with several numbers repeated or out of sequence.<sup>2</sup>

The best shop along this block was Buszards, 'bride cake manufacturers and confectioners', occupants of No. 197 next to the steps and houses westwards from about 1850 until 1940. At its acme of fashion in the 1880s it was thus described in a puffing piece of journalism:

Buszard's establishment is literally an emporium of wedding-cakes and of the delectable meats of which they are composed. One's eye there rests upon rows of these precious emblems of affection, ranging from the wedding-cake designed for a princess to the less expensive cake manufactured to meet the tastes of one to middle fortune born. There is no other shop in London, as far as we are aware, devoted so exclusively to one speciality. The wedding-cakes of Messrs. Buszard are sent to all parts of the world. It is no uncommon thing for an order to come from Paris, the city of all others where one might suppose the confectioner's art had attained the highest state of perfection. 'Buszard's' is a favourite resort of ladies during the season. They go there to eat ices, the while, no doubt, they ponder the (let us hope) pleasant recollections which crowd around wedding-cakes already eaten, and anticipate with joy a wedding-cake or two yet to be cut.<sup>3</sup>

Buszards grew out of the bakery of Thomas Jolly, who occupied a shop at the former No. 350 next to Blenheim Steps in the 1840s. F. W.

Buszard, compiler of *The Jolly-Buszards Book of Fish Recipes: Based on Recipes Used at the Old Bakery and Cooked Meat Shop, Oxford Street, London, 1823* (1953), pushed the pedigree back further, claiming to be the great grandson of 'Old Ben Jolly, who was in business in Oxford Street, London, early in the nineteenth century', selling bakery items and cooked meats. William Buszard, biscuit maker and confectioner, took over around 1850. After he died in 1877, advertisements for bride cakes began to appear, perhaps in response to the skills and ambitions of his son, the second William Buszard.

Despite the latter's early death in 1884,<sup>4</sup> the firm continued to prosper and expand under his brother George as W. & G. Buszard, taking over adjacent premises to No. 197 at Nos 199 and 201 and for a time adding a dependency further west at 504 Oxford Street. By the 1890s the main bakery was in Camden Town. The Oxford Street premises were taken up mainly by showrooms and refreshment rooms, while a warehouse at the back faced the mews. The back building was a five-storey addition designed in 1890 for George Buszard by the City-based architect William G. Bartleet and sanctioned by the district surveyor, Robert Kerr, despite LCC reservations about its safety in case of fire. It included a special refreshment room for ladies, and bedrooms for the male staff on the top floor. In 1924 the shop interiors were updated by William Woodward & Sons, architects. Around 1930 the Aerated Bread Company bought out the family, but the Buszard name and business continued at Nos 197–201 until the premises were irretrievably damaged during the Second World War.<sup>5</sup>

Buszards enjoyed a short post-war revival at 496–500 Oxford Street but disappeared in the 1950s. Meanwhile for a few years from 1948 an LCC Civic Restaurant occupied the old site in a temporary building designed by Lewis Solomon & Son. For the site's later history, see below.<sup>6</sup>

No. 203 (previously 347) is marked on Tallis's guide as the Pantheon Dining Rooms. That name survived the suicide of a proprietor in 1854, but dropped away in the 1880s, though restaurant use continued under French

and Italian managers. In 1890 there was a rebuilding under the name of Café de la Paix on behalf of the partners Costa & Magri. However by 1900 the establishment had again been rebranded as the Washington. This in its turn cannot have caught on, since by 1905 the premises had ceased to house a restaurant.<sup>7</sup>

The Circus Restaurant, at 213 (previously 343) Oxford Street, exemplifies a trend whereby eating houses sometimes superseded West End pubs in Victorian times. Previously the Nag's Head, the premises were taken over as a restaurant around 1865 by Augusto Gianella, most likely a Ticinese Swiss. Twenty years later Gianella dissolved a partnership and gave the building a radical make-over under the direction of Banister Fletcher. The outcome, documented in Bedford Lemere photographs of 1886, hints that Fletcher may have been seconded by craftsmen from Gianella's community, since the front had a decorative North Italian flavour topped off with a dainty gable. Inside, the main restaurant space was long, narrow and toplit, with tiled and mirrored walls, and landscapes painted on the canted sides of the ceiling. A teak stair led up to a small minstrels' or smoking gallery. There was a back entry towards Hills Place, where an extra house was taken into the restaurant property in 1893.<sup>8</sup>

Now abetted by Camillo Gianella, Augusto acquired a new lease in 1903. But in 1912 the Circus passed to a new owner, J. Frankenburg of Cabins Ltd, for whom alterations were made by the architects Boehmer & Gibbs. They planned further changes in 1915. The restaurant was still doing good business in 1931; applying then unsuccessfully on behalf of W. Hill & Son to create a new outside canopy, J. Douglass Mathew, Son, & Ridley, architects, claimed that it was 'of the highest class', could accommodate 238 persons and held a licence for dancing in the basement. But not long afterwards the Circus Restaurant closed and was demolished.<sup>9</sup>

The freeholds of the houses on either side of the top of Hills Place, covering the sites of the present Nos 213–225, had by the 1820s come into the hands of Thomas Morgan of St Mary Cray, an accumulator of miscellaneous London properties. They then descended via his daughter Augusta to the Gosset family and were put up for sale at auction in 1903. Several, including Nos 213–217 and 225, were bought by the Prudential Assurance Company. In the case of Nos 215 and 217 that involved a deal with J. Lyons & Co. During the second half of the nineteenth century these premises (previously Nos 342 and 341) had housed the old-established Oxford Street firm of Nicholas Hosking, alternatively described as an outfitter or leather portmanteau trunk and bag manufacturer. The booming Lyons firm now had its eyes on the property for one of its teashops, and Montague Gluckstein duly put in the highest bid on its behalf. Under the deal struck with the Prudential, the Gluckstein family was offered either a mid-length lease or a longer one if they agreed to rebuild. They chose the longer option, taking the builder W. S. Shepherd into partnership on a sublease. Nos 215 and 217 were therefore rebuilt as a single composition in 1907 to designs by A. M. Ridge, with facings in red brick, Portland stone dressings, and the Lyons name liberally plastered over the front. In fact the teashop occupied the full breadth of the ground floor only at the back, the shop at No. 217 and the upper premises being separately occupied. In 1937 Lyons added 1–9 Hills Place to the property, rebuilding in the typical brick style of that decade.<sup>10</sup>

The present large building at **Nos 197–213** had a two-stage genesis. In 1935 the architects Lewis Solomon & Son embarked for the Chalfont Trust Ltd on plans for a large new speculative block covering the sites of 207–213 Oxford Street, 3–4 Ramillies Place at the back and Nag's Head Yard. This was a steel-framed building planned to have open lower floors for a department store, offices on top, and separate manufacturing space at the back facing the mews. The front was symmetrical over a central

entrance with Portland stone cladding to the upper storeys, while the other elevations were finished in brick with Crittall windows. Promptly constructed, the building was christened Jubilee House. Adrema Ltd, makers of addressing machines, took up an option on the factory element but a tenant had to be sought for the store. A new company called Seven Price Stores showed an interest but proved a flash in the pan and soon faded away.<sup>11</sup>

In their stead the lower floors were taken in 1937 by Littlewoods, the Liverpool-based firm owned by the Moores family. Littlewoods had developed out of a football pools business before expanding into mail-order selling. Their move into chain stores was very recent; the Oxford Street branch took shape only months after their first store opened in Blackpool. Their regular architects at that time, J. S. Quilter & Son, made the changes required. In the first instance the Jubilee House depot was largely devoted to mail order, for which the mews access at the back from Ramillies Place was a boon.<sup>12</sup>

Then came the disruption of the Second World War, when the neighbouring Nos 197–205 were destroyed by bombing and the basement of Nos 207–213 was temporarily occupied by the BBC. Subsequently Littlewoods resolved to expand the store, which for many years was their only Central London branch, though there were suburban outlets at Brixton and elsewhere. In the first phase, the basement was turned into a large cafeteria. A reorganization of the whole space followed in 1951–2. Both these campaigns were designed and superintended by Littlewoods' in-house architects, based in Liverpool. Later a bigger expansion took shape. The neighbouring site at Nos 197–205, which awaited redevelopment, belonged to the Oddfellows Friendly Society, by then also the freeholder of Jubilee House from whom Littlewoods held their lease. In 1958 Littlewoods made a deal with the Oddfellows whereby the freehold was made over to a subsidiary of Littlewoods, the Fork Manufacturing Company, which then

leased the properties to the Oddfellows at a nominal rent. The Oddfellows in turn issued a sublease of 22 years to Littlewoods at £42,450 per annum, after which the property was to become wholly Littlewoods' through the subsidiary company. On the strength of that arrangement, Littlewoods agreed to rebuild Nos 197–205 and connect it with Jubilee House.<sup>13</sup>

That work took place in 1960–2, to the designs once again of Littlewoods' own architects under D. M. C. Roddick. To unify the doubled-up building a new curtain wall, typical for offices of that date, was created, replacing the old façade at the western end but fronting entirely new construction in the eastern section; this culminated next to the Ramillies Street steps in a blank end of Portland stone shielding the stairs that gave access to the upper-floor offices. Littlewoods took over the back portions of the enlarged building's lower floors for the purposes of extending its selling space, but the front section of Nos 197–205 was sublet to smaller shops. Thus aggrandized, Littlewoods ran the store successfully; around 1970 a second Oxford Street branch was opened at Nos 506–520. Then the fortunes of the chain waned and both branches closed in the early 2000s.<sup>14</sup>

The present **Nos 215–217** replaced the Edwardian building on this site in 2005–7. Designed by John McAslan & Partners on behalf of Scottish Widows Unit Funds Ltd, it is a small and bland twenty-first century block of shops and offices, with a framed structure, a flat-faced front dominated by glass, and cast-stone cladding to the enclosing frame. Patterning of the window fins devised by the glazing specialists Carpenter Lowings adds a touch of texture. The building tucks around the corner to include 1–9 Hills Place.<sup>15</sup>

Occupying the eastern angle with Hills Place, **No. 219** is a small stone-clad building of 1950–1 containing shops and offices, with wrap-around corner windows in strips. Replacing a café previously on this site, it was designed by Ronald Ward & Partners as a small speculation for Jack Salmon, who transformed his interest into Oxford Street Properties Ltd. It is

a listed building, no doubt by virtue of the three charming relief panels commemorating Festival of Britain year at the Oxford Street ends of the upper-storey windows.<sup>16</sup>

*Hills Place to Argyll Street*

This is another Oxford Street block in which recent shops and offices predominate; the earliest extant building is Nos 221–223 of 1914. Of predecessors, No. 225 has by far the greatest claim to interest.

**Nos 221–223** is a conventional stone-clad block of shops and offices, sponsored by Charles Edward Kayler, a businessman, and dating from 1914. The architect was A. S. R. Ley, and the contractor John Garlick Ltd. The shop's first occupants were Samuel Brothers, tailors and outfitters. Later they were supplanted by Alexandre Ltd, also tailors. An extra storey was added to the building in 1950.<sup>17</sup>

In 2007–9 the rear premises behind this block at 10 Hills Place received a boost in the shape of an arresting luminous exterior wrapping attached to a small office redevelopment for Clarendon Properties, designed by Amanda Levete Architects (previously part of Future Systems). The existing low building was raised by three extra storeys. The idea behind the wrapping was 'to create a billowing, distorted surface that would capture the glances of passers-by from the north'. The skin, engineered by the German façade specialists Frener and Reifer, consists of extruded and bent aluminium panels attached to steel outriggers and spray-painted in silver. The architects first thought of making it black, but at the suggestion of Rosemarie MacQueen of Westminster Council the colour was changed to silver. Tucked into the upper portions of the front but invisible from street level are four elongated half-eye windows to light the offices.<sup>18</sup>

The history of No. 225 falls into two phases. Here between 1798 and 1908 stood the best-documented of the smaller shops in Oxford Street, the premises of the chemists John Bell & Co. The Bell shop front survives today in the Wellcome Museum. This was succeeded from 1910 till 1984 by a well-known cinema complex, usually remembered as Studios One and Two.

John Bell was the second son of Jacob Bell, a Quaker mastmaker who is said to have given up his trade because he felt it unethical to make masts for ships to be used against the Americans in the War of Independence. He was apprenticed to Frederick Smith, a Quaker chemist practising in Haymarket, and later married his daughter. Combining diffidence and moral rectitude with a streak of ambition, John Bell in the summer of 1797, when aged only 22, noticed an empty shop at 338 (as it then was) Oxford Street which had previously been the headquarters of the cabinet-makers Riley & Fowler.<sup>19</sup> He then prevaricated, only taking it over a year later, in December 1798, with encouragement from Smith and some support from an uncle. Bell's obituary claimed that there was only one other true chemist's shop in Oxford Street at the time, an establishment at the corner with Argyll Street which chiefly sold cheap powders. Like Smith, Bell determined from the outset to stock and make only high-quality, unadulterated products. A slow start and early losses caused Bell to consider selling up, but the business soon prospered, allowing him to take on his first apprentice in the winter of 1800–1.<sup>20</sup>

The elevation of the shop, perhaps along with the whole premises, was rebuilt in about 1806.<sup>21</sup> The pretty and characteristic timber shop front now in the Wellcome Museum probably dates from then, with a central entrance and bowed display windows on either side. It was filled throughout the shop's lifespan by 'old-fashioned carboys with contents of different colours' which the apprentices had to dust down every morning. Previously there had been a separate private entrance to the house above, but that was not needed after John Bell moved to Wandsworth with his

family and the upper floors were increasingly given over to housing the staff.<sup>22</sup>

The shop itself was redesigned internally in 1824 by Theophilus Redwood, then an assistant at Bell's, later a professor of pharmacy. Left and right of the main door stretched counters for dispensing prescriptions, behind which were stationed shopmen and assistants charged with particular tasks (e.g. 'infusioneer', 'surgeon's man', 'regulars', etc.); against the walls behind, 'boards' contained all necessary ingredients. All the fittings were of mahogany and there were no glass cupboards. At the back a central door under a clock led to the laboratory, with the manager's office to one side. Upstairs, at least in latter years, the first floor front room overlooking the bottom of Great Portland Street functioned as a dining room for managers and a sitting room for assistants on Sundays; the walls were lined with proofs of Landseer prints. Above and in the back quarters dwelt apprentices and assistants, who were amply fed and watered three times a day – there were always eight barrels of beer on the premises.<sup>23</sup>

The 'elaboratory' and other workrooms at the back went through several stages. By the 1830s the running of the firm was largely in the hands of Jacob Bell, John's oldest surviving son. Inventive and charismatic, Jacob was not only a talented chemist and businessman but also an able draughtsman, having taken training in art at Henry Sass's drawing academy in Bloomsbury. He was a lifelong friend of several artists, notably Landseer, and among his interests was the evolving relation between art, photography and chemistry. Jacob Bell is famous as the moving force behind the Pharmaceutical Society and its journal. The tea party which preceded the founding of the Society was convened at his Oxford Street premises in 1841. He also took part in politics, both as a prominent member of Marylebone Vestry (having taken a house in Langham Place) and as a short-lived MP – he was elected for St Albans in 1850 but unseated on

grounds of electoral irregularities, and never managed to regain a seat despite several attempts.<sup>24</sup>

The laboratory at 338 Oxford Street as it was in 1841 is memorably depicted in a picture commissioned by Jacob Bell from W. H. ('Birds Nest') Hunt, noted as a watercolour painter who specialized in natural details or portrayals of rustics. 'The Laboratory' is outside Hunt's normal oeuvre. Most likely it was painted as a favour to Bell, who may have wished to make an accurate record of arrangements at the time the Pharmaceutical Society started work. The painting was engraved by J. G. Murray, and lent by Jacob Bell to the Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition of 1857. It shows John Simmonds, Bell's apothecary and one of his father's early apprentices, seated on a barrel in a toplit space stirring a heated crucible, while an apprentice boy, William, cleans a mortar. Miscellaneous apparatus litters the floor. Between them, the shop can be seen with Great Portland Street visible in the distance.<sup>25</sup>

In the late 1850s the 'elaboratory' was reconstructed under John A. Godfrey as 'a pharmaceutical manufacturing plant capable of making everything except chemicals on a large scale'. This change was probably initiated by Thomas Hyde Hills, who took over the firm's daily business after Jacob Bell became absorbed in outside interests and then fell increasingly ill. Hills, from a Maidstone family, had joined the firm as an assistant in 1837 and became a partner when John Bell died. He was Jacob Bell's closest ally and friend; the two bachelors latterly lived together at Langham Place. After Jacob's death in 1859 at the early age of 49, Hills inherited the firm and moved house to Queen Anne Street.<sup>26</sup>

The property where the Bell shop and workshops stood along with the flank of Queen Street behind had been in the freehold of Thomas Morgan and his various heirs since the early nineteenth century. In the mid 1860s T. H. Hills acquired new long leases and possibly the freeholds of the houses behind; it was at that time that the name of Queen Street was

changed to Hills Place. The premises seem then to have been further extended south-eastwards. Photographs of the laboratory taken in 1871 after these changes show a brighter and cleaner layout than Hunt's painting of thirty years before, with workmen toiling under an all-glass roof and Hills and his manager conversing in the centre.<sup>27</sup>

After T. H. Hills's death in 1891 John Bell & Co. was inherited by his nephew Walter Hills, who made few innovations. But the sale of their Oxford Street freeholds in 1903 by the Morgan descendants heralded changes. The shop itself, by then No. 225, was bought by the Prudential Assurance Company. A ten-year lease on the premises had still to run, but around this time Walter Hills concluded a merger with the chemists Croyden & Co. of Wigmore Street.

In 1908 the amalgamated firm of John Bell & Croyden moved into the brand-new Welbeck House, Wigmore Street. Simultaneously Hills sold his interests in the Hills Place premises at the back to the Prudential. He seems to have contemplated taking a new long building lease of the whole site, but in May 1909 he sold out to the Food Reform Society.<sup>28</sup> He or others must have felt sentimental interest in the old premises, for the Bell shop front was taken down and preserved. Eventually it found its way to the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum, adjacent to John Bell & Croyden's new shop in Welbeck House, Wigmore Street, and was there displayed in the basement from the 1920s.<sup>29</sup> It can now be seen at the Wellcome Foundation's building in Euston Road.

The Food Reform Society must have backed out, for by November 1909 a new company, Cinema House Ltd, was acquiring the new lease of 225 Oxford Street and 2–10 Hills Place and had started erecting 'Cinema House' on the site. This was to consist of a model 'electric theatre' at ground level, 'luxurious refreshment rooms', studios for making and producing films, and two floors of offices. Cinema House Ltd was a subsidiary of the London Cinematograph Company, which itself had recently joined forces

with Electric Theatres (1908) Ltd and Biograph Theatres Ltd in the mutable world of early cinema ownerships. Plans had been produced by Melville S. Ward, architect, and a contract let to J. Chessim & Sons, builders.<sup>30</sup>

When Cinema House opened in July 1910, the *Building News* hailed it as 'the last word in living-picture theatres'. A narrow, gabled front towards Oxford Street faced in reconstituted Ketton stone and representing the width of the Bell shop, had to encompass a concave external vestibule, one stair down to the restaurant, another up to the offices and a passage to the auditorium at the back. Planned at ground level and facing south, the auditorium replaced the former Bell workshops and was therefore broader, stretching eastwards to flank Hills Place. It was lined in dark arched oakwork and had a decorative plaster ceiling and timber-balustraded balcony. The capacity of Cinema House was 600 (500 in the stalls and 100 in the balcony). The refreshment rooms below were on two levels, with space for some 100 seats at basement level surrounding an arcaded well, and another 80 in the sub-basement. They were probably not fitted out till 1912, when a fresh architect, E. Keynes Purchase, was working on the complex and a clock advertising 'Macfarlane's Restaurant' was attached to the front. The studios for film-making were on the third floor above two storeys of lettable offices.<sup>31</sup>

The business arrangements of the London Cinematograph Company proved unsatisfactory, for it was wound up soon after the opening. Cinema House Ltd however continued into the 1920s as a subsidiary first of Electric Theatres Ltd and then of a chain called Grand Centrals Ltd. The companies' affairs were run from the first-floor offices. The basement restaurant achieved fame or notoriety as the Chinese Café, one of the first successful Chinese restaurants in the West End. It had replaced Macfarlanes in 1914 under the management of Chong Choy, previously chef at the Chinese Embassy in Portland Place. Reported in 1924 to be frequented by 'the Chinese, Japanese and Siamese Ministers and their suites', it was later known as a haunt of prostitutes.<sup>32</sup>

For a short while in 1934 Eric Hakim and Elsie Cohen took over Cinema House with the ambition of extending their policy of showing good foreign films which they had established at the Academy Cinema near by. The architects Leslie H. Kemp & Tasker were making minor alterations to the offices and the auditorium that summer. But Hakim's finances were unsound, and the next year he was supplanted by D. J. James (later Sir David James), who from small beginnings had built up a chain of London suburban cinemas. James had ambitious plans. He managed to oust the tenants from the restaurant (latterly the Avesta Café) and in its place planned a two-level 'news theatre' in the basement and sub-basement. Kemp & Tasker were retained, fitting out the interior in an Art Deco manner with a three-sided balcony. The front acquired a new canopy and signs in neon proclaiming in the first instance 'Studio One Foreign Films', and 'Studio Two News and Travel'. Thus renamed and enlarged, the cinemas reopened in March 1936. But the cultural progressivism of Hakim and Cohen did not endure, so that Studio One soon reverted to ordinary feature films.<sup>33</sup>

Having sold his other cinemas to the Rank Organization, James continued to own Studios One and Two until his death in 1967. By then he had become well known as a philanthropist, donating notably to Welsh causes. He ran his business interests from Cinema House under the name of Amalgamated Picture Theatres Ltd and maintained a flat there.<sup>34</sup> The main change during these years was the complete covering of the façade with a colourful, fountain-like display of neon tubes, installed by Ionlite Ltd in 1951–2. After James died, the cinemas and building passed into other hands and the showing of newsreels in Studio Two was replaced first by cartoons and 'shorts', latterly by feature films. In 1977–8 the interior was broken up by Star Cinemas into four small auditoria, but that did not avail. The cinemas closed in 1984 and the building was demolished shortly afterwards.<sup>35</sup>

**No. 229** (formerly 336) was the Plume of Feathers pub, latterly the Feathers, from at least the middle of the eighteenth century until 1967. Originally it lay immediately east of a stable yard known by 1759 as Feathers Yard.<sup>36</sup> A comparison between the elevation shown by Tallis (*c.*1839) and a photograph of 1954 shows a front remarkably unchanged between those dates: stuccoed, with a spirited parapet rising to a centrepiece enclosing a circle, perhaps once carrying a motif of feathers. The interior, though like all pubs subject to many changes, maintained its overall Georgian plan form as late as the 1960s. A conversion into a Wimpy Bar in 1967 cannot have helped, and the building was not thought worthy of preservation after plans for its replacement came forward in the 1980s.<sup>37</sup>

**Nos 231–235** were rebuilt together with Feathers Yard behind in 1886–7. The architect was George Edwards and the builders were G. & J. Green of Hackney. The Oxford Street buildings were humdrum shops with offices over, fronted in Portland stone and granite. To replace the yard, Edwards laid out a narrow shopping arcade 200ft in length known as Oxford Circus Avenue, accessed from a passage between Nos 231 and 233. It housed small shops, claimed as ‘light and spacious’ but not much larger than stalls, though there were upper floors. Small publishers and dealers in sheet music proliferated here; one shop was briefly in the early 1890s the London showroom of the Glasgow stained-glass artists and decorators J. & W. Guthrie. The front shops underwent sundry conversions over the years.<sup>38</sup>

The current Nos 225–235 were built in 1999–2000 by Legal and General Assurance to designs by the T. P. Bennett Partnership. For Nos 237–239 and buildings between Argyll Street and Oxford Circus, see Chapter 12.