

Chapter 22

453–533 Oxford Street

North Audley Street to Park Lane

No stretch of Oxford Street has undergone so many changes as its westernmost frontage on the south side, especially between Park Street and Park Lane. Developed later than the rest of the street in the first place, it has undergone two complete reconstructions. Today it is taken up by two large blocks of shops, offices and flats, on the monumental scale common to both sides of Oxford Street at its western end.

The original development of this part of the Grosvenors' Mayfair estate went back to 1764–5, when building agreements were made for both blocks with John Spencer and John Phillips, carpenters.¹ Between North Audley Street and Park Street, the development chimed with the type of houses and shops built further east. But west of Park Street, Phillips was able to secure the building of some fashionable private houses including Camelford House, and Hereford Street was squeezed in here, parallel with but set back from the main road frontage. That could not have happened before 1759, when the Tyburn executions were shifted from their traditional site within sight of the Park Lane corner to a new position further northwards up the Edgware Road.

The first reconstructions of these blocks took place from the 1860s onwards, when the original long Grosvenor leases were falling in. The overall strategy for the rebuildings, devised by the Grosvenor Estate's surveyors Thomas Cundy II and III, is discussed in the previous chapter. East of Park Street this campaign took place in phases and was completed in 1902, leaving a commercial frontage not dissimilar to that further east along the Grosvenor

Estate's Oxford Street properties. But a different character again obtained west of Park Street, where a garden introduced along the street front shielded the new houses of Hereford Gardens, set back on the former site of Hereford Street, from the annoyances of the main road. Neither reconstruction proved durable. The North Audley to Park Street block has since been twice rebuilt, first in the 1960s and then again in 2010–12. Hereford Gardens was already outmoded by the inter-war period, when houses and garden alike were done away with and replaced with Hereford House (1928–30), a large block of shops and flats given a dash of monumentality by Lutyens. To its west comes the site of a former cinema. That belongs historically with the flats at the corner with Park Lane, including 535 Oxford Street, with which the street terminates.

North Audley Street to Park Street

The prolongation of North Row west of North Audley Street allowed for the building in the 1760s of quite good houses with gardens and stables or workshops behind along this part of the frontage. This was a long block, originally comprising over twenty houses, some of a fair width. The numbering then ran west–east from 248 at the Park Street corner, where there was a pub, the Duke of Gloucester (later the Gloucester Coffee House), to 262 at the North Audley Street equivalent, with some irregularities and repetitions. In 1880 the row became Nos 453–497 (odd), running east–west.

Several high-class tradesmen made their premises along this block. At No. 250 was the china and glass business of the Mortlock family, who originated from Melbourn, Cambridgeshire. A foundation date of 1746 has been claimed for this firm, started by John Mortlock, though where it began has not come to light. It had transferred to Oxford Street under William Mortlock by 1785. In 1833 the Mortlocks were described as chinamen to their Majesties. Though always dealers, never manufacturers, at the height of their

influence 'they exercised enormous power and influence over the manufacturers, particularly including Coalport, insisting that the products that Mortlocks sold should bear the Mortlock mark rather than that of the original maker'. They remained at No. 250 till about 1860, when they moved to No. 204 (later 470) opposite, near the Orchard Street corner.²

Other trades in the 1790s included ironmonger, cabinetmaker, paperhanger, corn chandler and coachmaker. The narrow-fronted No. 252, originally built in about 1769 by Joseph Saunders, carpenter, is shown on Tallis as having an elegant façade, with a curving porch on columns, a pedimented window on the first floor and a Diocletian window. The premises included a well-lit workroom at the back. These doubtless were the result of alterations by his architect son George Saunders, whose office was at this address until his death in 1839.³ No. 256 housed the premises and yard of the Bedford family of monumental masons, active for much of the nineteenth century.⁴ No. 260 was between 1806 and 1852 occupied by the speculative architects and surveyors Robert William Jearrad senior and junior and Charles Jearrad. The Jearrads are best known for their developments in Cheltenham, but Charles and the younger R. W. Jearrad were successively surveyors to the St George's Hanover Square Vestry.⁵ For the saddler's businesses of Samuel Blackwell, at No. 259 from 1802 onwards, and Matthew Wilson and his successors at No. 257 from about 1806, see Champion & Wilton below.

The first rebuilding of this block took place in three phases running from west to east, of the 1860s, 1880s and early 1900s. The initial campaign affected only the eastern end, Nos 248–252 (later 489–497). Built to designs by Thomas Cundy III in 1865–6, this was the earliest part of the Grosvenors' Oxford Street holdings to be undertaken as a range and the only portion of their rebuildings to be finished during the time of the second Marquess of Westminster. It was also the first instance of Oxford Street tenants combining together as separate lessees under a single architect and builder.

In March 1863 the Marquess agreed that all this property together with most of Hereford Street further west should be rebuilt according to a plan produced by his surveyor, Thomas Cundy II. This part of the plan was the first to be carried out. In exchange for 85-year leases, the five rebuilding tenants chosen by the Estate had to agree to rich elevations by Thomas Cundy III in the Second Empire style, like those he was planning just then for Hereford Gardens and Grosvenor Gardens. There were to be four shops besides the rebuilt Gloucester Coffee House or Hotel next to Park Street. Cundy must have intended that the range should eventually stretch all or most of the way to North Audley Street, for at the corner with Park Street (No. 497) he accentuated the block with a full attic and high pavilion roof, but supplied no answer to this feature at No. 489. The materials for the fronts were red brick with copious Portland stone dressings and much ornamental ironwork, and the builders were Mark Patrick and Son.⁶

Nos 461–487 were all rebuilt between 1883 and 1888 in red brick with stone dressings to designs by T. Chatfeild Clarke & Son. But they were treated as six separate buildings and allotted different degrees of ornamentation. Nos 461 and 463, built in 1886 by E. Lawrance and Sons, had a very decorative front which *The Builder* believed 'partakes largely of the style of the Brothers Adam'. Its disproportionately high and ungainly lower part, embracing an entresol, was redeemed by some delicate Portland stone carving. No. 463 became a car showroom in 1908, when the proprietors, Burgess & Harvey, were marketing a car called the Grosvenor, as well as a motoring horn named 'the "Boa Constrictor"', from its peculiar likeness to that formidable reptile. This horn possesses a fine deep tone and should become popular'.⁷ No. 465, erected in 1885 for Hammond and Company, leather-breeches makers, appeared simpler in front, but the tender of the builders, Hall, Beddall & Company, was higher.⁸ Nos 467–473, of 1885–6, made a fairly basic Queen Anne composition built for H. T. Batt & Son, veterinary surgeons, by Miller & Brown; another architect, H. M. Newlyn, was also involved here.⁹

Nos 475 and 477 were chronologically the last and the most disciplined of the Chatfeild Clarkes' designs, built by R. Cox in 1887–8 for Anthony Kitchen, art metalworker and ironmonger. The three tiers of late-Gothic windows alternated with brick piers and were crowned by straight, richly ornamented gables. No. 477 was latterly (1930s–1959) Bumpus's bookshop.¹⁰ Nos 479–483, built by Colls & Sons in 1883–4, had a broader but hardly less decorated front, with piers of cut brick, dressings of Corsehill stone, and large unorthodox windows with cast-iron mullions. The building was used as showrooms by Holland & Holland, coachbuilders, who had occupied premises here (previously No. 254) since the first half of the nineteenth century. A lift could take the heaviest coaches from the basement to the second floor. In 1912 the premises were taken over by the Austin Motor Company, which redecorated the showrooms in the 'Adams' style and installed a handsome library and clubroom on the first floor.¹¹

Next door, Colls & Sons were again builders in 1883–4 of Nos 485–487, a more conventional pair of shops with residences above erected for Tautz & Sons, breeches-makers, and B. Peal & Company, bootmakers. The materials were polished red granite for the ground floor and red brick above with Corsehill dressings. Peals were a highly reputable firm claiming a pedigree going back to 1791. New to Oxford Street in the 1880s, they stayed there till their shop was scheduled for demolition in 1958, then moved for the last few years of their existence to Wigmore Street. At that time the basement of No. 487 was said to house 50,000 pairs of lasts.¹²

The rebuilding of the block was completed by Nos 453–459 with 22–23 North Audley Street, a small but elegant set of shops with flats over, designed by Herbert Read and Robert Falconer MacDonald and built by Holloway Brothers in 1900–2. The client was E. H. Wilton of Champion & Wilton, saddlers, tenants of the previous premises. The building had three storeys towards North Audley Street and five on to Oxford Street. The ground floor was of Douling stone, the upper portion of red brick with stone dressings,

and the style a picturesque and effective Arts and Crafts treatment. Champion & Wilton occupied Nos 457–459, subletting the corner site to a bank. They were the successors to two old-established firms of Oxford Street saddlers. One started out under the name of Matthew Wilson, first in South Molton Street, moved around 1806 to Oxford Street, and became successively Wilson, Wilkinson & Kidd, then Wilkinson, Champion & Frewer and finally (in about 1875) Champion & Wilton. A neighbouring firm of saddlers, Samuel Blackwell, also long-established, was taken over by Champion & Wilton in the 1880s. The business remained here till 1958, when it was ousted by the Grosvenor Estate's second reconstruction and moved round the corner into North Audley Street.¹³

This block was the first portion of the Grosvenor Estate's Oxford Street frontage to undergo post-war redevelopment with new shops and offices. The decision to rebuild predated by some years the Chapman Taylor plan for reconstructing the Grosvenors' whole commercial frontage. Planning started in the 1950s, and after clearance building took place in two phases between 1962 and 1969. The developers were Land Securities, acting in partnership with Taylor Woodrow, and Fitzroy Robinson & Partners were their architects. The western portion at Nos 475–497 came first, with shops in front and a sixteen-storey office tower at the back, in the standard post-war idiom of framed construction and cheap curtain walling. This became the London headquarters of Stewarts & Lloyds, steel tube manufacturers. Further shops and offices followed in the same manner at Nos 453–473.¹⁴

Like many post-war buildings, the Fitzroy Robinson block was short-lived. It was replaced in 2008–12 by another, even more overweening Park House announced in the first instance as a mixed-use scheme by Land Securities working with Hamiltons Architects. The basic design concept was worked out in 2006, and Sir Robert McAlpine started work on the foundations in 2008. Legal challenges to the planning consent then intervened, along with an economic downturn. As a result the project was mothballed by Land

Securities and sold to QNB Capital, the investment arm of the Qatar National Bank. Resumed in 2010 under the architects Robin Partington & Partners and the main contractors Mace, the building was completed in 2012.

The block is conceived as a single, whalelike entity, totally glazed, continuously curved, and dropping in height and depth from west to east. There are three floors of retailing, beneath seven floors of offices entered from Park Street and 39 high-end apartments reached from North Row. The approach was presented as a modern response to the monumentality of Selfridges opposite. As to the building's sinuosity,

The top surface of the roof and each of the four facades were defined as tori which intersect to generate the overall volume. These tori have radii as large as 2.5km, and the radius and locus of each torus was adjusted to fine tune the building's geometry according to its rationale.

Each opening in the curtain wall is 'a unique hyperbolic paraboloid', described geometrically as part of a prolate spheroid.

The curtain walls therefore represent an elaborate technical exercise, made feasible only by parametric modelling worked out using CAD software by Bentley Architects, with help from Ramboll Façade Engineering and two expert cladding contractors, Seele GmbH & Focchi Spa. To relieve the surfaces from monotony, vertical fritted glass panels were fitted to designs by a sculptor, Walter Bailey. The block 'has been referred to by critics as a huge glittering slug and a misconceived cruise liner', pronounced *Construction Manager*, but 'the audacious curving facade of Park House delivers something many shoppers will love: a bit of West End bling'.¹⁵

Park Street to Park Lane

Hereford House, the monumental block of 1928–30 which occupies all but the western extremity of this frontage, is the third building on its site. It superseded a complete street at the rear, at first Hereford Street (1777–85),

which in its turn was replaced by Hereford Gardens (1866–75), both backing on to North Row. Those developments are covered in Volume 40 of the *Survey of London*. The front or northerly part of Hereford House occupies the site of a mixture of minor buildings erected in the 1770s and '80s. These had later been pulled down and converted by the Grosvenor Estate into an open space in front of Hereford Gardens, when that redevelopment took place in 1866–74.

The whole rectangle bounded by Park Street on the east, Park Lane on the west, Oxford Street on the north and North Row on the south was the last parcel of ground to be taken under a building agreement during the initial development of the Mayfair part of the Grosvenor estate. In 1765 John Phillips, carpenter, contracted to pay £320 per annum for 99-year leases of the block.¹⁶ By then Phillips had established a considerable reputation as a master carpenter both in London and elsewhere. The agreement makes no reference to a new street being cut through the area, but by 1773 when the first building leases were granted, both the line of Hereford Street and its name had been determined. It was originally intended to extend all the way from Park Street to Park Lane but the western end was in the event used as the courtyards of two large mansions built there, Camelford House and Somerset House.

Phillips and, after his death in 1775, his executors, sublet the ground along the shallow plots between Hereford and Oxford Streets to building tradesmen, among them John Barlow, bricklayer and coal dealer; William Barlow, bricklayer; John Dibbs, painter; John Elkins, bricklayer; William Phillips, builder; and Thomas Webb, plumber. A conventional row of ten houses was built here, originally south-facing, i.e. towards Hereford Street, in which they were initially numbered. The subleases dated from 1774–8, but the houses were not all occupied until 1787.¹⁷ Originally they had short gardens at the rear on the Oxford Street side, as depicted on Horwood's map. But shops were soon enough built there and can be seen in Tallis's view of the frontage. By then the houses had acquired the numbers 250–257 Oxford Street, which must have been the source of some confusion, as the same numbers were also

applied to houses east of Park Street.

West of this row came a short stub road down to Hereford Street, and beyond that down to the Park Lane corner a miscellany of stables and back buildings belonging to Camelford and Somerset Houses. There was one exception. On a plot immediately west of the stub road a substantial house with a coach-house and stabling was built, probably by John Phillips, and completed in 1774. Originally numbered in Oxford Street, the house later became 10 Hereford Street, and, after 1870, 12 Hereford Gardens. Lieutenant-General Sir Hildebrand Oakes lived there from 1815 until his death in 1822, to be followed by Sir Hudson Lowe, governor of St Helena during Napoleon's exile. Lowe lived there till 1840, acquiring a new long lease in 1837. Tallis shows the main body of this house as of four tall storeys, with a two-storey wing to the east.¹⁸ In later years it was turned into bachelor chambers and refronted, with extra rooms built over the east wing, so that the final result became a rather grim, uniform front, eight windows wide and four storeys high. The presence of the building had an adverse effect on the letting of the grand new houses built behind in Hereford Gardens after 1864. It was demolished on the expiry of the lease in 1893 and its site added to the existing garden to its east (see below).¹⁹

In 1863, one year before the leases granted under John Phillips's building agreement of 1765 were due to expire, the Marquess of Westminster decided that the Hereford Street area should be rebuilt, in accordance with the plans then being devised by the Cundys for the Oxford Street frontage and its vicinity. Thomas Cundy III's first design was for nine Second-Empire-style houses on the south side of the street and stabling on the north side, the latter replacing the ten shops and houses facing Oxford Street. George Trollope & Sons, the builders who took up the terms in 1866, then asked for modifications. These included the substitution of a garden for the proposed stabling on the ground between Hereford Street and Oxford Street.²⁰ But Trollopes failed in their wish to have a high wall substituted for railings

between the garden ground and Oxford Street. The main purpose of this proposed wall was to reduce the noise of traffic, but the Vestries of St Marylebone and St George's, Hanover Square, objected to its intended height, which was ultimately in 1870 fixed at only 4ft 6in, topped by iron railings.²¹

The grand houses built in Hereford Gardens between 1866 and 1874 enjoyed only a short-lived heyday. By 1916 the Grosvenor Estate was prepared to co-operate in any scheme to buy up the existing leases and use the site for commercial purposes, its attitude now being that 'the character of the neighbourhood has changed and that the time for the retention of residential property in the position of Hereford Gardens has gone by'. The Estate subsequently decided to acquire the whole site including the gardens and to advertise it for building purposes, and between 1925 and 1927 spent substantially in purchasing the outstanding leasehold interests. By agreement with the London County Council and Westminster City Council the roadway of Hereford Gardens was closed and building lines set back, particularly in Oxford Street.²²

The Grosvenor Estate eventually accepted an offer by A. W. Gamage Limited, the department store in Holborn, to take a 99-year lease at an annual rent of £20,000 for four years and £30,000 for the remainder. A building agreement to this effect was signed in September 1928. Gamage's proposed to erect a store with flats above and for this purpose formed a new company, Gamage's (West End) Limited, which was incorporated in the same month. The company also arranged to borrow £450,000 from the Estate in instalments as construction progressed.²³

Gamage's architects were C. S. and E. M. Joseph, but the building had to be erected 'to the satisfaction of Sir Edwin Lutyens and Mr Blow as ... Estate Architects'; Lutyens, in particular, had a firm hand on the finished design. He submitted elevations and a typical upper-floor plan for the Duke's approval in 1928 and several of his sketches and detailed drawings for the building survive among the collection of the Royal Institute of British

Architects. When the building was completed in 1930 Messrs Joseph were described as the architects with Lutyens as consultant. The builders were Higgs & Hill.²⁴

The result of their collaboration is a huge building of red brick and Portland stone. The influence of Lutyens is evident in the general arrangement of the mass of the building, particularly at the upper levels, and in the large-scale classical features, designed to be seen from below. These features give character to the building, and what the architectural correspondent of *The Times* called, in another context, the skilful manner of his 'stone binding of the brick mass' is very apparent.²⁵ But the overall design, which was no doubt the product of a compromise between the reticent neo-Georgian then in vogue on the Grosvenor estate, the need to give dignity to what was in part a block of luxury flats, and the demands of a superstore, passed over the new possibilities then being opened up in the field of commercial architecture and relied instead on a scaled-up version of Georgian domestic architecture with superimposed classical motifs.

Whatever the building's merits and defects, its development proved disastrous for its owners. The flats, which were planned between deep open light wells at the eastern and western ends of the building above second-floor level and included as many as three bedrooms, two reception rooms and quarters for servants, were successful. But the store in the centre, which opened in September 1930, lost money steadily and closed after only eight months. The building had cost over a million pounds to erect and fit out, and Gamages (West End) Limited was, in consequence, severely under-capitalized. With its creditors pressing, the company appointed a Receiver in April 1931 and went into liquidation.²⁶ Undoubtedly a major factor had been the depressed condition of trade and business generally, and when the premises were put up for auction the reserve price was not reached. The building then came into the possession of the Grosvenor Estate trustees as first mortgagees.²⁷

In 1932–3 a consortium of six insurance companies formed a new company, Hereford House Limited, which purchased a two-hundred-year lease from the Estate for £350,000 at an annual rent of £20,000. The aim was to utilize the store part as a permanent exhibition and trade centre for displaying the products of British industry, and the building re-opened as British Industries House.²⁸ The scheme received a good deal of favourable publicity in its early years but interest waned and in 1938 the building changed hands again.

The non-residential section of Hereford House was then taken by C & A Modes Limited and reverted to its original function as a store. Among alterations undertaken by C & A's architects, Robin, North & Wilsdon (later North & Partners), was the rebuilding of the first three storeys of the central part of the Oxford Street front in stone. This now became C & A's headquarters, in place of Nos 376–384 on the opposite side of the road. The firm's main offices, including a boardroom and a substantial advertising section, were on the third floor. By 1953 if not earlier there was also a fashion theatre on the first floor. Robin, North & Wilsdon and their successors continued to work for C & A until the late 1960s and made various internal changes to Hereford House, including to the flats. For retailing purposes C & A occupied the centre block only (Nos 505–515), flanked by other and changing shops in the wings (Nos 499–513 and 517–525), including a small news cinema in one of the sub-basements.²⁹

After C & A departed at the end of 2000, for a fortnight the empty store housed an exhibition called Break Down, in which the artist Michael Landy set out all his worldly goods, from his Saab 900 car to his Calvin Klein underpants, and dispatched them for destruction. Much of the space was taken up by a motorized conveyor belt in a figure of eight along which yellow trays passed containing Landy's possessions. These then passed to a shredder in which the items were dismantled, shredded and granulated before being buried in a landfill site. In Richard Cork's words, 'no setting could ram home

the full meaning of [Landy's] recklessness more powerfully than this deserted temple of consumerism'.³⁰ The store was subsequently occupied by the Primark chain.

Marble Arch Pavilion Cinema site (Nos 527–533)

The westernmost building on the south side of Oxford Street before the flats at 139–140 Park Lane is a low-rise complex of shops. They follow the outline of the cinema formerly on this site but retain almost nothing of its fabric. The cinema, at first the Electric Pavilion, later the Marble Arch Pavilion, was planned in tandem with the Park Lane flats but completed first, in 1913–14, to designs by Frank Verity.

The cinema replaced Camelford House (covered in Volume 40 of the *Survey of London*) and its stables, which faced on to Oxford Street. With the lease of Camelford House soon to expire, followed by that of Somerset House, its neighbour at the Park Lane corner, the Grosvenor Estate considered around 1910 how the two sites might be redeveloped as one. Offers from Perry Brothers to build a hotel and then from J. Lyons & Company fell through, in part because the Somerset House site was not yet available. Eventually it was agreed to build a low cinema first on the Camelford House site, followed by flats at the Park Lane corner. In December 1911 the Grosvenor Board was entertaining several such propositions, of which one to be designed by Frank Verity met with most favour. At an advanced stage Verity's client backed out, so the Board pressed his scheme on Israel Davis, another of the applicants. Davis had already built several London cinemas for his family-owned Electric Pavilion chain (Cinematograph Pavilions Ltd), but his financial position was somewhat infirm. His intention therefore was to complete the cinema and then assign the site for the flats to another undertaker. On that basis work began in 1913 on the cinema, which was finished shortly after the outbreak of war. The lease was then granted to

Davis, whose affairs were pressing.³¹

The Pavilion Cinema, Marble Arch, as it was called, stretched through from Marble Arch to North Row. It had a commodious raked auditorium at ground-floor level capable of seating 1,180, with a few boxes in narrow balconies along the sides, and a ceiling divided laterally into coved panels. A generous vestibule preceded it, lit from a recessed clerestory. The low Oxford Street frontage was finished in Portland stone, with four free-standing columns in the centre, small shops left and right, and an entrance on the extreme left leading to a café at the back with staff rooms over. The cinema prospered as a result of the war and continued under Davis's ownership till 1927, when it was taken over by Gaumont British Theatres. At that point Verity made designs for extending the balconies, but they were not executed. He must have found favour with Davis, for he went on in 1923 to design for him the Pavilion, Shepherd's Bush (now a hotel). In 1954 the site was bought by Montague Burton, the tailors, but films continued showing till 1956.³²

The site has been through a number of different uses since then. In 1986 it was rebuilt with a wild-looking front in the now-forgotten post-modern 'Memphis' idiom for a music superstore, Smithers & Leigh, but the shop was soon sold on to Virgin Megastores and remodelled. It has subsequently been divided between different retailers. The carcase of the cinema walls vestigially remains.³³