

Chapter 21

381–451 Oxford Street

Davies Street to North Audley Street

From Davies Street westwards to Park Lane, the freehold of the Oxford Street frontage mostly belongs to the Grosvenor Estate. It therefore differs from the rest of the south side in having been under the continuous control of one of the great London estates since it was first developed from the 1720s onwards. The history of the Grosvenor estate in Mayfair is covered in Volumes 39 and 40 of the *Survey of London*, Chapter Nine of Volume 40 being devoted to Oxford Street. So this and the succeeding chapter reprise that account, with appropriate additions and changes. They omit an extended discussion of Grosvenor policy in respect of their Oxford Street holdings, for which readers are referred to those earlier volumes. The chapters are divided into two to reflect the distinct nature of the frontages, past and present, east and west of North Audley Street.

Despite the controlling hand of a single ownership, the frontage here is no less mixed than elsewhere along the street. Buildings of all dates from the 1870s onwards survive, from specimens of lively late Victorian brick architecture for shops, now looking almost petite, to the monumental blocks of Park House and Hereford House west of North Audley Street.

Building development on the Grosvenor estate in Mayfair started in the early 1720s, working generally westwards until Park Lane was built up some thirty

or forty years later. But the main period of construction on the estate, including that of the central Grosvenor Square, took place in the 1720s and '30s. Oxford Street was fringe territory on the estate's northern edge. It was neither attractive nor valuable so long as executions continued to be held at Tyburn and before the second resurfacing of the turnpike road in the early 1770s ushered in the beginnings of fashionable shopping. Another inhibition to development was an old water pipe running parallel to the road a little to its south, from the corner with Tyburn (later Park) Lane. This carried water to the City of London from springs at Paddington; there were conduit heads at two points, just east of the corners with North Audley Street and Park Street, and tenants of the buildings eventually erected along its length were obliged to allow access to the system.¹

For such reasons the original takers of plots with frontages towards the future Oxford Street in the 1720s were inclined to view this district as back land and let it out for building gradually and piecemeal. The background to Sutton Nicholls's engraving of Grosvenor Square, which offers a rough indication of progress in the 1730s, presents a piecemeal appearance along the main road. Rocque's map of 1746 shows that building had then progressed only as far as North Audley Street; but there was still a large gap at the corner with Davies Street, where buildings were not erected until the 1750s.² Nor were the Oxford Street block sizes generous. Five minor north-south streets intervene between Davies Street and North Audley Street – from east to west, originally James, Bird, Duke, Queen and George Streets (now Gilbert, Binney, Duke, Lumley and Balderton Streets). The frontage between Gilbert and Binney Streets is little more than 70ft, and from Lumley to Balderton Street about 90ft, making these blocks among the shortest along the length of Oxford Street.

One hint of the frontage's humble quality in the eighteenth century was the creation of St George's Market on part of the present Bond Street Station site. This butchers' market was founded in 1785–6 without sanction

from Earl Grosvenor in a yard between James (now Gilbert) Street and Davies Street, with access at either end from Oxford Street and Chandler (now Weighhouse) Street. It was the project of Henry Tomlinson, a plumber and glazier of Marylebone with interests in the development of Hans Town, Chelsea. Tomlinson took a 35-year lease of the ground and erected what must

remembered that such a handsome and costly edifice will for many years be surrounded by a filthy market, fostered by the neighbouring householders, and the stall people, protected as they are by the Magistrates, set you at bold defiance to remove them'. Later, Squire reminded the Marquess that because of this overflow from St George's Market he could not expect adequate rent, 'nor can it be supposed that the Public, which has for so many years been accustomed to walk on the North side of the Street, will be induced to change the route until the Street on the South side is rebuilt'.⁶

Thomas Cundy III's contributions to Oxford Street were confined to the elevations, so that lessees were allowed to have their own architects to plan their premises. But the fronts were carefully worked out. In the course of negotiations over Squire's premises, entresols like those used over shops in Regent Street were considered and rejected. Terracotta was also prescribed for some of the cornice details (as at Grosvenor Gardens). More significant on all these buildings was the use of red brick, which was 24 0 0 0.24 89.75999 650.48 cm BT 50 t, wl

allowed. Next door, the Deaf and Dumb Church (St Saviour's) was erected in the same years by Arthur Blomfield; this was naturally Gothic and contributed to the growing discrepancy in style of the new Oxford Street. Cundy's Parisian approach was now doomed. The next opportunity for rebuilding was in 1875–6 at Nos 431–433, when Cundy seems to have been asked to supply something Jacobean or Queen Anne. But the result was so unconvincing that after this he retired from the architectural fray and acted solely as the Estate's surveyor. It was, however, probably Cundy who recommended J. T. Wimperis as architect in 1876–8 for Nos 443–451, the first fully Queen Anne range on the estate. Though its architectural merits were moderate, Wimperis was careful not to depart too far in his proportions and details from Cundy's lead near by, showing that Queen Anne and Second Empire were not always poles apart.

Queen Anne remained more or less the style for the rest of the rebuildings in Oxford Street, though the first Duke of Westminster (as the third Marquess became in 1874) permitted a divergence of approaches. The biggest contribution came from Thomas Chatfeild Clarke, who with his son Howard designed no fewer than seven buildings in Oxford Street. The six built west of North Audley Street have all been demolished, but the ebullient Nos 385–397 (of 1887–9) remain east of Gilbert Street.

By 1890 most of the commercial frontage west of Davies Street had been rebuilt. The reconstruction seems to have had no marked effect on the commercial character of the street. A reduction in the number of food shops was greatest in the St George's Market district close to Davies Street; but this decline, from eight butchers recorded in the estate's sector of Oxford Street in 1841 to one in the directories fifty years later, and from six cheesemongers to two over the same period, had begun before rebuilding got under way. The better-capitalized trades naturally had greater powers of survival, partly because their workshops were rarely located along the street itself. They were often restricted by rebuildings in the smaller streets behind. Yet as late as

1884–6 the coach-builders Thrupp & Maberly did not seize the opportunity of rebuilding to move their workshops to some less constricted faraway site, preferring still to concentrate their showrooms and works on the ground offered by the Estate at 421–429 Oxford Street. On the whole the scatter of trades in this part of the street was not so different in 1890 from what it had been fifty years before. The only speciality discernible besides coaches was leather goods; the 1890 directory records two leather-breeches-makers, four bootmakers, and one saddler.

This site has a complicated history. The original alignment of the top of Davies Street did not follow the main course of that street but was skewed back north-westwards along the line of South Molton Lane. Only a small part of the Oxford Street frontage here was on Grosvenor land.

When the Central London Railway from Bayswater to the City was first proposed in 1890, the Grosvenor Estate was among the opponents who helped scotch the original Bill. A revival of the scheme was soon mooted, and this time the promoters took care to consult the Duke of Westminster's interests by enquiring as to his 'wishes in improving the northern end of Davies Street', with a view to siting a station here. After some hesitation the Duke acceded, but a clause was inserted into the Act which became law in August 1891 protecting the Estate. It provided that if the Central London Railway Company decided to build a station near Davies Street, it should be obliged to straighten the top of the street.⁸

works, and to shift the station to the opposite side of Oxford Street at the foot of Marylebone Lane. Then after pressure from the Vestry, a new agreement was negotiated in June 1897. By this arrangement the Duke of Westminster presented to the company his part of the site scheduled for purchase under the Act of 1891, together with an additional small piece of land between that and the Westminster Electric Supply Corporation's premises in Davies Street; in return, the company agreed to carry out the street improvements and build the station. Work began in 1898 and was still not quite finished when the Prince of Wales opened the Central London Railway in the summer of 1900. That was partly because the London County Council objected to a slight narrowing of the proposed width at the top of Davies Street. The new Bond Street Station finally opened just a few months late. Like other stations along the route, it was at the outset a single-storey structure in brick and terracotta, designed by Harry Measures. An electricity sub-station was added at the rear in 1903–4.⁹

The surplus land between the station and Davies Street was sold in 1906 to Henry Bailey, from whom the builders Perry Brothers took a lease of the site with an option to purchase and erect shops with chambers over. A prominent but undistinguished building in red brick and terracotta (with a Lyons tea room on the ground floor) was duly erected at the Davies Street corner in 1906–8 to designs by the City-based architect W. A. Lewis. The upper storeys, which extended over the tube station, became the Grosvenor Court Hotel. In 1961–2 this was acquired and renovated by Maxwell Joseph's Grand Hotels (afterwards Grand Metropolitan Hotels), only to be demolished in the early 1970s.¹⁰

Bond Street Station itself was largely rebuilt in the 1920s. In 1923 escalators were installed and in 1926–7 a new booking hall was built. A low but distinctive fascia towards Oxford Street was also erected to the design of Charles Holden of Adams, Holden and Pearson, with a plain facing of Portland stone and an overhanging canopy sporting the typical broad blue

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rent.¹⁸

This short block, Nos 399–405, covering the Oxford Street frontage between Gilbert Street and Binney Street, consists of a compact block of offices and flats designed for Lloyds Bank by Sir John Burnet, Tait & Partners. Built in 1967–70, it is square in outline and faced in concrete panels, but relieved from monotony by a first floor of unusual height with a recessed storey immediately above.¹⁹ The previous building on the site was a range of shops with chambers above leased to Edwin Hollis, a pork butcher, designed by his architect, Joseph S. Moye, and built by H. Saala in 1880–2. The elevations were in an elaborate Queen Anne style, with granite piers between the shops and plenty of ornament on the red-brick upper storeys.²⁰

This block, Nos 407–413, constitutes the sole survivor from Thomas Cundy III's considerable contributions to Oxford Street. The history of rebuilding here goes back to 1861, when Peter Squire wished to reconstruct his chemist's shop at the corner with Duke Street. His application was deferred by the Grosvenor Estate until 1863, and in the following year Cundy produced an elevation, details of which were settl

James Estcourt.²¹ On the eastern half of the site (Nos 407 and 409) Samuel Mart, a fruiterer, applied for rebuilding terms in March 1872. Later in the year Cundy submitted an elevation extending the fronts of Nos 411 and 413, to which Mart's architects Tolley & Dale (who had already built at Nos 415 and 417) had to conform. Alfred Thomas of New Cross undertook the construction in 1873–4.²²

Cundy's design for this short range was similar to that for the larger 489–497 Oxford Street and his purely residential range at Hereford Gardens. Since these have now been demolished, Nos 407–413 has an interest disproportionate to its present appearance. Its display of red brick, terracotta dressings and prominent roofs heralded the kind of treatment that was to prevail on the Grosvenor estate throughout the first Duke of Westminster's day, even if Cundy's French and Italian detailing was to be jettisoned.

This block is occupied by Nos. 415–419, a commercial building erected in

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showed his originality more often in these instances than in his run-of-the-mill ecclesiastical practice. For him, the commission led to further work on the Grosvenor estate, at St Peter's, Eaton Square, St Mark's, North Audley Street and St Mary's, Bourdon Street.

The building was to occupy a frontage of fifty feet to Oxford Street and some seventy-five feet stretching back into Lumley Street; a small site to its south was reserved for the erection of a chaplain's residence. The plans, authorized in January 1870, included a lecture hall and committee room in the basement. The church itself was to hold 250 deaf and dumb, but could accommodate a rather bigger ordinary congregation, since it was agreed with the Rev. J. W. Ayre of St Mark's that it should come under his jurisdiction and be available also for the poor of his parish.²⁸ In June 1870 an appeal for further funds was published in over the names of several eminent clerics, peers and politicians, and on 5 July the foundation stone was laid by the

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for redevelopment and offered £10,000 for surrender of the lease at the end of 1920. This was refused, and in March 1921 the Association enquired what the cost of the freehold might be under the recent Act for Enfranchisement of Sites of Public Worship. An impossibly high price of £60,000 was suggested by the Estate's solicitors. The only alternative accommodation offered was St Philip's, Buckingham Palace Road, which the Association thought unsuitable. But the Estate remained intransigent on the questions of renewal or of the cheap sale of the freehold. In July 1922 the Association therefore agreed to surrender their lease for £15,000 and to move out at the end of the year.³³ The last service was held on 31 December 1922.

The Royal Association kept a centre in Oxford Street, but its new purpose-built church, designed by Edward Maufe, was constructed at Acton. St Saviour's, Armstrong Road, Acton, was opened in 1925 and contained a number of the fittings from the old church in Oxford Street. These, including Gawen's Good Shepherd figure and Maguire's Last Supper painting, were transferred to the British Deaf History Society's Deaf Museum and Art Gallery in Warrington when the building closed in 2014. Davidson's Ephphatha painting may also be seen there. The Acton building became St Thomas's Syrian Orthodox Cathedral in 2016.³⁴

The church site (No. 419) was the first to fall vacant, and in April 1923 G. Thrale Jell produced designs for steel-framed shops, showrooms and offices here for Wotton and Son. The elevation that he submitted to the LCC was substantially different from that built by F. D. Huntington Limited in 1923–4, but both were meant to be part of a scheme for the whole block. No. 419 came into use as Selfridges' wholesale department.³⁵ At the other end of the site, No. 415 was rebuilt for the outfitters Horne Brothers in 1925, but the linking portion at No. 417 had to wait until 1935.³⁶ In both cases the architects were Wimperis, Simpson & Guthrie, but so far as is known they carried out Jell's elevations. The range forms one homogeneous block, with well-disposed metal windows between stone-fronted piers and rounded corners, and

showing in a pared-down version the influence of Frank Verity. In 1930–2 the freehold of the building was sold by the Grosvenor Estate.

Another short block, this is now entirely occupied by Keysign House, 421–429 Oxford Street, of 1937–8. The dominant occupier of this site in the nineteenth century was the coach-building business of Thrupp & Maberly, descended from a firm started around 1765 by Joseph Thrupp in George (later Balderton) Street just behind, where open space allowed for workshops and storing carriages. Early in the nineteenth century the Thrupps inserted a showroom at 269 (later 425) Oxford Street in place of a simple archway leading into their works. As illustrated by Tallis, this shows a central entrance, three giant arches rising through generously spaced upper storeys and a handsome crowning pediment. In 1857–8 the building was extended upwards by a storey and given a weighty Italianate treatment by the architects F. J. & H. Francis, who replaced the pediment with a heavy cornice. The change coincided with a merger with George Maberly, a Welbeck Street coachmaker.³⁷

The block (by then Nos 421–429) was rebuilt in 1884–6 by William Brass and Perry & Company to designs by Henry S. Legg and Arthur Kinder, in a lumpy Tudor style faced in red brick with terracotta dressings. The Thrupp & Maberly showroom now occupied the complete frontage, with a consolidated manufactory behind.³⁸ The firm remained at this address until 1914, when they sold out to Gordon Selfridge. Latterly their main business was body-building for motor cars and vans, which they carried on thereafter first at 475 Oxford Street and then at 20 North Audley Street. In 1924 the works moved to Cricklewood.³⁹ After making alterations to the designs of H. O. Ellis & Clark, Selfridges opened Nos 421–429 as its first provision store in the autumn of 1914. Food of every kind was available from ‘hygienic white marble halls’. For most of the inter-war period, Selfridges therefore operated

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houses with shops here. These were agreed for around 1875 but apparently not erected until 1882 by William Macey. Adkins' architect was F. Boreham, but Thomas Cundy III may have intervened with the elevations. These, according to the Duke's decree, were to be 'red brick but somewhat different from the rest of Oxford Street'. The result is a not very confident essay in a gabled Jacobean style.⁴³

Nos 435 and 437 were rebuilt in 1889–90 for the National Penny Bank, an institution devoted to 'the promotion of thrift among the working classes' which had in 1875 been allowed to occupy premises on this site at a low rent as a short-term measure. Eventually the bank authorities were asked to vacate or rebuild. They chose the latter course, and the present building was erected in a style approximating to that of Nos 431 and 433, in the usual red brick with stone dressings. The builder was William Scrivener.⁴⁴

Nos 439 and 441 occupy one of only two sites on the Grosvenor estate's Oxford Street frontage to be rebuilt between 1890 and 1914. The site has a narrow front but is broader at the back towards North Row. In October 1903 John Wells, a silversmith, was permitted by the Grosvenor Board to rebuild on his own account, using Balfour & Turner as his architects – Eustace Balfour being the Grosvenor Estate's surveyor at the time. Wells assigned his building agreement to George Neal, a contractor of Kilburn. Under Neal's auspices, the building was erected in 1907–8 and occupied by the National Radiator Company.⁴⁵ Towards North Row the building has a pleasing, simple brick character, but the Oxford Street elevation is an interesting example of Balfour & Turner's later work. It is faced entirely in stone and relieved by arches to the main windows carried on granite columns. There is a small pediment over the centre at attic level. The ground floor has suffered from an inappropriate shop front, while the stonework of the upper storeys has been recently defaced with paint.

Nos 443–451 (odd) Oxford Street and No. 21 North Audley Street, the first speculative range of shops and chambers in the Queen Anne style to be built on the Grosvenors' Mayfair estate, were erected in 1876–8 by Thomas Patrick to the designs of J. T. Wimperis. Thomas Patrick had with his father, Mark Patrick, previously built 489–497 Oxford Street 'and lost money on one house', so he was offered these five sites in compensation.⁴⁶ Wimperis was perhaps chosen as architect for this, his first work on the Grosvenor estate, because of connexions with Thomas Cundy III over projects in South Kensington.⁴⁷ The elements of his design, though parading the Queen Anne and red-brick motifs of which the Duke approved, were not in essence far removed from Cundy's own earlier designs for Oxford Street. The granite facing which characterized the original shop fronts along this part of the street may still be seen at the corner with North Audley Street, which is also marked by a sharp tourelle.

The range can boast artistic occupants of distinction. At No. 449 William Morris and Company had their showrooms from 1878 until 1918, while No. 447 was the office of the architect John Dando Sedding from 1886 until his death in 1891, and then of his assistant and successor Henry Wilson until 1898. Also at No. 447 between about 1878 and 1910 was the London office and showroom of the Sheffield ironfounders Longden & Co., described in the directories as 'cooking apparatus manufacturers' but among the leading makers of artistic grates.⁴⁸

William Morris himself was less present in Oxford Street than at his firm's former premises in Red Lion Square, but one anecdote has been handed down about his handling of clients there:

A person of importance called to discuss the carpeting of his new house. The best specimens of the Hammersmith carpets, then produced in a complete range of pure bright colour, were submitted to his inspection. He gave to them a somewhat impatient and wandering attention. 'Are these all?' he asked. He was told yes. 'But I thought', he went on, 'your colours were subdued?' At this Morris, who had been gradually boiling up during the interview, boiled over.

'If you want dirt,' he broke out, 'you can find that in the street.' To the street the offended customer turned, and that was the end of his dealings with Morris & Company.⁴⁹