

'A Paragon of Lucidity and Taste': the Peter Jones Department Store

by

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The survey and research into the Peter Jones department store was initially undertaken by Kathryn Morrison and Tony Calladine in July 1998 as part of a wider project on the history of Shops and Shopping. The project was begun by the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England in 1998 and is now being continued by English Heritage. It is national in scope and aims to analyse the development of English shops and shopping from the medieval period to the present day, using buildings as the primary evidence. The project will consider the impact of changing shopping habits on the built environment from the historical and architectural viewpoint.

The Peter Jones department store, on the north-west side of Sloane Square in London, is currently undergoing a refurbishment costing in excess £80,000,000 in order to bring it up to date and increase the retail space.¹

Now sixty years old, the building has begun to show its age. In 1939, the newly completed store was voted best modern building in a survey by *The Architectural Review*. It received twice as many votes as any other building.² *The Architect and Building News* concurred, remarking that 'the new building proclaims itself as a paragon of lucidity and taste'.³ In terms of architecture, it was a remarkable change for a store that had developed piecemeal; expanding into neighbouring plots as the opportunity arose. When a purpose-built Peter Jones store was erected in the 1870s, its design was not out of the ordinary. In contrast, however, the store erected on the same site in the 1930s was the talk of the architectural press and embodied the latest ideas in architectural design. Its glazed façade and emphasis on verticality was out of the ordinary, developing ideas that were emerging on the continent. The store was at the forefront of the on-going experimentation with curtain walling;

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soon to be one of the mainstays of architectural design in the second half of the twentieth century.

THE ORIGINS OF THE DEPARTMENT STORE

The origins of the British department store lie in the 1830s in the industrial cities of the north of England. The first two are said to have been Bainbridges, of Newcastle-on-Tyne, and Kendal Milne and Faulkner of Manchester, now Kendals. Both were selling a variety of merchandise by the 1850s⁴ and others followed. These early stores were not yet true department stores but were developments of both the bazaar and the draper's shop. The influence of the bazaar lay in its emphasis on a disparate range of goods marked up and sold at value-for-money prices. Drapers took up the idea by adding associated goods to their textile merchandise and by using wholesale methods for selling to the general public. As they became successful, they expanded into neighbouring premises. The London department stores of Harvey Nicholls and Woollands are good examples. Beginning in small drapers' shops, they gradually expanded on their sites before replacing their amalgamated shops with purpose-built stores in 1889 and 1896 respectively.⁵

The middle-class shopper enjoyed the prestige of shopping at the larger stores, previously the reserve of the wealthy, but was in need of reasonable prices and cash sales. In this respect, the habit of displaying price tags in these stores was a reassurance, and for those travelling in from the suburbs, it was useful to know that a wide variety of merchandise could be found in one place. For the storeowner, the large middle-class market provided the opportunity for quick turnover with no credit, which allowed him to offer attractive prices but also increased his profits.

These early stores sold goods that were associated with their trade, but did not provide the wide range of goods which is the mark of the fully developed department store. What has been seen as the first true department store did not originate in this country but in France. The Boucicaut brothers, drapers, opened their store, the Bon Marché, in 1855, the year of the Paris Exposition. The latter is important, for in many ways the great success of the store was based upon those elements which had drawn vast numbers of people to the Paris show and the Great Exhibition in London four years earlier. The fascination of these exhibitions lay in the huge amount and variety of items on display, and the fact that they were the newest and the best. Moreover, in the Paris Exposition at least, all the items were priced. In effect, the Boucicauts created at Bon Marché an exhibition at which all the display items were for sale. The Bon Marché was followed by the Louvre and then in 1869 by the Boucicauts' second Bon Marché; a new building on the site of the first, designed by M. A. Laplanche and extended in 1873 and 1876 by Eiffel and Boileau. Both the original Bon Marché and the Louvre were not built as department stores, the former being a piecemeal development of a draper's shop and the latter being built as a hotel for the Paris Exposition. Laplanche's building may well, therefore, have been the first purpose built department store.⁶

Perhaps the greatest impetus for the building of purpose-built stores in the late nineteenth century came from the United States. Here there was a spectacular

growth in the number of stores between 1870 and 1910, including two Wannamaker's stores of 1875-6, 1902-10 and a fifteen-storey store in New York in 1903. Bloomingdales opened in 1872 and the Schlesinger and Mayer store in 1904.⁷ Marshall and Snelgrove had erected a purpose-built store in London in 1875, but it was David Lewis (no connection with John Lewis) who began to build purpose-built stores in Britain in any number, beginning in Manchester in 1880 and Birmingham in 1885.⁸

PETER JONES

The way in which the Peter Jones business expanded after its inception reflects the typical evolution of a department store. Peter Rees Jones, the son of Thomas Jones, a Monmouthshire hat manufacturer, was born in 1843. He became apprenticed to a draper in Carmarthen before moving to London in the 1860s where he worked for drapers in Newington and Leicester Square. His first shop was opened in Hackney in 1868 but was moved quickly to Southampton Row, Bloomsbury and from there to Draycott Avenue (then Marlborough Road). Here in 1872, building work to expand the premises caused a party wall to collapse injuring his wife and killing a member of staff. In 1877 he acquired Nos. 4-6 King's Road, Chelsea and, being the only large draper's in the area, his business prospered. By 1879 *The Architect* published an illustration of a new Peter Jones store on the site of Nos. 2-6 Kings Road which also had a front on Symons Street. It is not clear, but this may have been the first phase of a development that was completed in 1895 with the completion of the store that survives today on Symons Street. By 1902/3 Peter Jones employed 300 staff and had a turnover of £157,000 and by the time of his death in August 1905, his store occupied most of the block, except for No. 25 Cadogan Gardens and the Star and Garter public house, which occupied the Sloane Square front. By this time, however, the business was in difficulty. Legend has it that in the spring of 1906 John Lewis walked from his Oxford Street shop to King's Road with twenty £1,000 bank notes in his pocket and bought Peter Jones outright. Trade did not improve, no share dividend was paid from 1906 until 1925, and for a while Lewis was grateful for the extra income generated by the Star and Garter, which he had acquired by 1915.

In 1914 John Lewis handed over the Chairmanship to his son John Spedan Lewis who, in 1916, took full control of the Peter Jones store. He introduced a third week of paid annual leave in 1918 and set up a representative staff council in 1919. He began the John Lewis profit-sharing partnership there in 1920, by which every employee receives preference shares, and argued that 'the days when a lot of shareholders could stay at home and do nothing and take a very large proportion of the earnings of a business are all over'.⁹ Nevertheless, the early 1920s saw trading problems and money was injected from the Oxford Street store until profit sharing resumed in 1925. Trading gradually improved until the time was right for a modern, new store to sweep away much of what had gone before. By 1936 the initial phase of the new building was complete.¹⁰

WILLIAM CRABTREE

The architect of the new store was William Crabtree (1905-91), a graduate of the Liverpool School of Architecture. There he had been taught by C.H. Reilly, and it was Reilly, architect for the John Lewis Partnership, who recommended his former student to John Spedan Lewis. Crabtree was interested in store design, the subject of his final-year thesis. He particularly admired the later work of Erich Mendelsohn, the architect of the De La Warr Pavilion at Bexhill-on-Sea (1935), and some of the best-known Modern buildings in Germany.¹¹

Mendelsohn designed a number of department stores during the 1920s, most notably three for the Schocken chain: Nuremberg (1926), Stuttgart (1928) and Chemnitz (1930). Schocken specialised in the no-fuss merchandising of a limited range of quality goods, sold at low prices, using the design of the store itself to provide the interest and attract the customers. The Modern style of the stores offered the 'promise of factory-like American efficiency and enthusiasm for a technological society'.¹² These ideas coincided with Mendelsohn's own view of the store as symbolic of a factory and of an efficient factory system. Indeed, the Nuremberg store, opened in 1926, was converted from an existing factory building. The simple elements of ribbon windows and a plain façade were retained. They are present in all three stores. For the Chemnitz store, the simplicity of the design was emphasised by a sweeping curve given to the main elevation. Additionally, Mendelsohn cantilevered out the façade so that the concrete frame did not interrupt the clean lines of the fenestration and allowed the walls to be light, in the fashion of a curtain wall.¹³ Both the curving façade and the curtain walling are echoed in the Peter Jones store.

Crabtree spent time viewing some of Mendelsohn's work first hand during a tour of Germany and Holland in 1930. He also worked in New York and subsequently spent a year in London with Joseph Emberton, the architect of the Simpson's department store in Piccadilly, now Waterstone's book shop.¹⁴ Nevertheless, it is the influence of Mendelsohn, and his Chemnitz department store in particular, that may be seen in the Peter Jones design. With the sweeping Modern façade, Crabtree created a distinctive identity for the store, in the way that earlier stores, Selfridges or Barkers in London for example, invoked classical motifs to convey an impression of luxury and grandeur. As with the early French stores, the style of the Peter Jones store conveys the impression that its contents are fashionable, innovative and the best.

THE PETER JONES DEPARTMENT STORE

The site of the store is encompassed by Sloane Square, Cadogan Gardens, Symons Street and King's Road. It comprises two distinct elements: a twentieth-century structure, the focus of this paper, the main elevation of which fronts onto the King's Road, and a late-nineteenth century phase which stands on the corner of Symons Street and Cadogan Gardens.

The Ordnance Survey Map of 1894 (Fig. 1) shows the store as a large block, with elevations to King's Road and Symons Street, but separated from Sloane Square

by a range of properties which included the Star and Garter public house on the corner of Sloane Square and King's Road. The 1895 store may have been one phase of a campaign of building which began in 1879 with the building of the store, noted above, at Nos. 2-6 King's Road. By 1893 the King's Road façade of the 1879 building had been extended westwards,¹⁵ possibly by Messrs. Perry and Reed, although *The Architectural Review* dates their work to 1896.¹⁶ A photograph taken at the turn of the century shows the King's Road elevation looking unchanged save for the replacement of the first-floor windows with large, segmental-headed show windows, similar in style to the ground-floor windows of the 1895 building.¹⁷ It is possible that Perry and Reed's work involved reworking this façade.

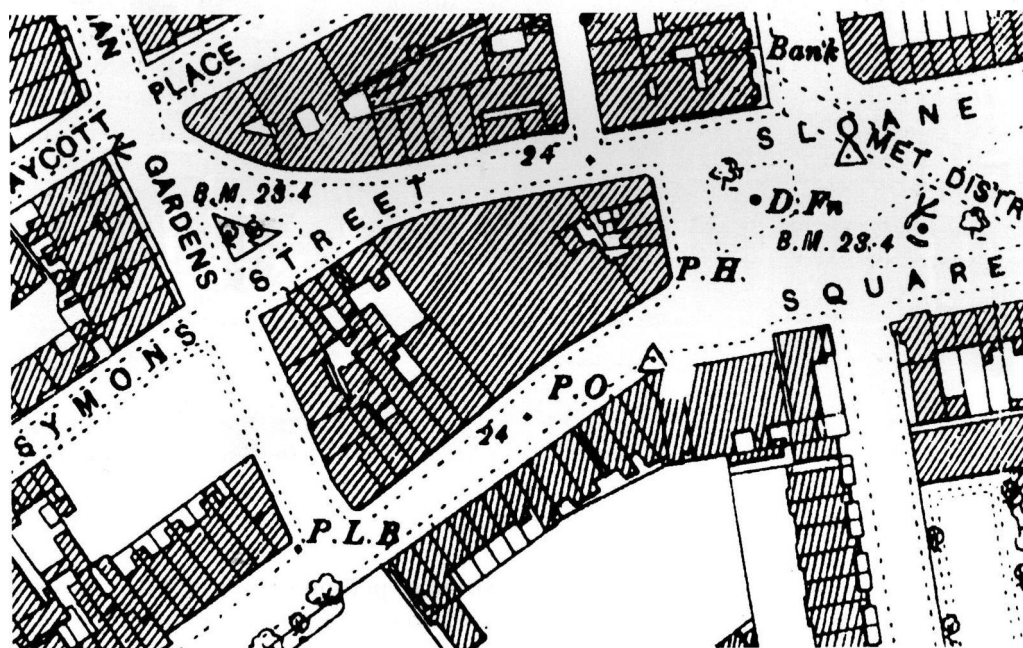


Fig. 1

Ordnance Survey map of 1894

The 1895 phase of the store (Fig. 2) is dated and initialled P.J. in the tympanum of the pediment over the main doorway. Rectangular in plan, with a slight change of line to follow the elbow of Symons Street, the red-brick building is nineteen bays in length and approximately eight metres wide. It is four storeys high with attics and is supported internally by two ranks of metal columns, probably of cast iron. These are mostly circular in section, fluted at the base, but they also include square section stanchions.

The main entrance doorway, situated on Symons Street, comprises a frieze and pediment raised over pilasters which create a recessed doorway and sidelights. Above this, three bays form a break-forward which has rusticated brickwork quoins.



Fig. 2

The Symons Street elevation, photographed by Bedford Lemere in 1896

These bays are capped by an open, semi-circular pediment above which rises a large, pedimented dormer with a domed roof and cupola. These central bays are heated from stacks contained in cross walls at each side, which probably indicates that the rooms were offices. Gabled dormers, with rusticated pilasters are placed regularly along the roof and are linked by a stone and brick balustrade. The fenestration of the first, second and third floors comprises horned sashes in segmental headed openings, with prominent keystones and sills in white stone. The ground floor, on the other hand, contains show windows divided by pilasters, with four-centred heads and white keystones. The store is much altered and fitted with modern shop panelling so that little can be deduced from an internal examination. This range is the only survivor from the nineteenth-century store. Its traditional brick and timber construction with load bearing walls, pierced with windows at regular intervals, and a slate-covered, pitched roof, serves to emphasise the radical nature of the 1930s building which replaced much of the earlier buildings.

The new store was erected in phases between 1932 and 1939. As William Crabtree was relatively inexperienced, the architects Slater and Moberly were

engaged to act as consultants along with C. H. Reilly. According to William Crabtree, the architects could find little precedence to help with their design and were aware that they were 'pioneering in the use of a metal and glass skin'.¹⁸ In Britain, much of the impetus behind the development of a glazed façade came from the glassmakers, Pilkingtons, who helped Crabtree with his research into the glass for the new store.¹⁹ David Yeomans traces such use of glass back to European examples such as the *Maison du Peuple* in Brussels (1896-9) and the *Samaritaine* Department Store in Paris (1905).²⁰ Although these examples were followed by more famous essays in glazed walling, such as the *Daily Express Building* in London or the *Cité de Refuge* in Paris, none is an example of curtain walling as we have come to understand it. That is, walls which not only perform no load-bearing role but which are also uninterrupted by the structure they conceal. In these examples (Yeomans offers more), the floor structure is apparent and is used as a support for the glazing to sit on. The result of this is that the buildings retain a horizontal emphasis. In these terms, therefore, it is clear that in designing the Peter Jones store, the architects took the next step towards curtain walling in two ways. First, the glazed panels are not in contact with the concrete structure behind but are held proud of it. Secondly, the whole building is given a vertical emphasis, by the use of continuous mullions, which runs counter to the structure behind. It was an aspect of the design which Spedan Lewis encouraged.²¹ Despite appearances, the windows themselves are set back from the line of the 'curtain' and sit on the concrete structure. Nevertheless, the importance of the building to the story of twentieth-century British architecture is clear.²²

Although the store may appear to be of one phase, it was in fact constructed in three main campaigns (Fig. 3): the first erected between 1932 and 1936, with the second following between 1936 and 1939. The latest phase, the section on the corner of Cadogan Gardens and King's Road, formerly No. 29 Cadogan Gardens, was built in 1964.

Due to the experimental nature of the store's design, a trial section, which now comprises the Cadogan Gardens elevation, was erected – presumably in 1932-3 (Fig. 4). The reasoning behind this was two-fold. First, it enabled the construction techniques to be tested. William Crabtree later said that, 'it helped us enormously to work out the structure and the glazed panels which were a comparatively new thing at the time'.²³ Secondly, the trial section allowed the installation of a heating plant and services for the whole of the new store into its basement. Subsequently, a tunnel was driven under the old buildings to take the service mains. In this way, as each new section was completed it could be coupled immediately to the mains ready below. This, and the phasing of the redevelopment of the site, was designed to minimise the disturbance to day-to-day business.

The Cadogan Gardens elevation, like the remainder of the building, is composed of vertical glass panels separated by slender continuous mullions. Unlike the remainder of the building, however, these mullions are of reinforced concrete with a painted metal facing, originally intended to be tile. It was envisaged that this would be the pattern for the whole building but the concrete took too long to dry

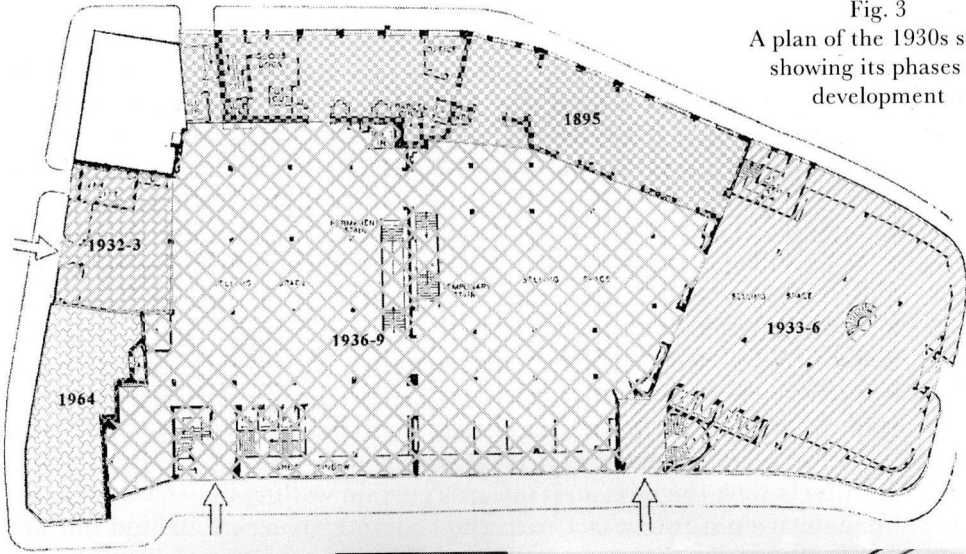


Fig. 3
A plan of the 1930s store
showing its phases of
development



Fig 4
The Cadogan Gardens
entrance (centre) showing
the concrete mullions behind
a metal facing and a cast-
lead flower trough.
Adjoining it (right) is the
1964 addition

and this method of construction was abandoned for the rest of the store. The trial section was allowed to remain and consequently the structure contains a remarkable record of the design and development process.

The first phase was erected between 1932 and 1936, with the second phase erected immediately afterwards and open in 1939. The first phase comprised a block at the east end of the site, fronting Sloane Square, where the main entrance is situated, and extending along King's Road as far as what is now the westerly King's Road entrance (Fig. 5). The second phase completed the King's Road elevation and linked the new store to the trial phase. Both phases are essentially the same in point of design, but there are minor differences (Fig. 6).



Fig. 5
A view of the Sloane Square elevation, taken around 1936, after the completion of phase one and at the beginning of work on phase two



Fig. 6
The store in 1998

The store is seven storeys high with a basement and sub basement and with the two uppermost storeys set back behind parapet railings. This feature was used by Mendelsohn in his Chemnitz store and has the effect of reducing the apparent height of the building to a level that is in keeping with the scale of the surrounding buildings. Its elevations comprise vertical panels of glazing divided by slender, vertical mullions spaced four feet apart. The abandonment of the reinforced concrete mullions, noted above, allowed Crabtree to design a cantilever construction, as Mendelsohn had used at Chemnitz, so that the outside wall could be reduced to a thin, lightweight 'skin' stretched around the concrete-encased, steel frame.²⁴ Rather than being of concrete, the mullions are composed of hollow, pressed steel sections with an outer face of extruded manganese bronze. In phase one, these have a painted, metallic bronze-coloured finish, but in phase two they have been painted differently. The metallic finish was the original look, although all of the mullions have been repainted since, in 1946 and 1961.²⁵

The windows are steel-framed and were made by Henry Hope and Sons of Birmingham.²⁶ They are divided by transoms into three lights, the central and

largest of which pivots around a vertical axis. In phase one, every window opens, but in phase two every other one is fixed. All the windows can be cleaned from inside the building, the intention of the designers being to reduce insurance costs.²⁷ The concrete edge of each floor is fronted with glazed panels that are painted on the inside, originally a 'greyish green'.²⁸ These panels open for replacing the glass or repainting. Stairs and WCs are accommodated in clusters of three bays that are faced with concrete and in which the windows are set flush with the outer face of the wall.

Show windows are important to the Peter Jones design and were so to department store design even from the earliest days. Woollands' window display was noted in a trade journal of 1873 as being exceptionally good,²⁹ but it was felt that Harvey Nichols' 'suffer much in not being able to make a continuous show of the whole of their windows, as several minor establishments come in the centre of the block of buildings'.³⁰ Selfridges had twenty-one show windows at ground-floor level when it opened in 1901, increased later to forty-nine when the building was enlarged.³¹ Lewis's in Manchester had twenty-four when it opened in 1927,³² and Harrods has show windows at both ground and first floor levels. The continuous, tall show window was thought in some quarters to be out of date in 1937. When D. H. Evans opened a store in Oxford Street sporting compartmentalised show windows, *Architectural Design and Construction* reported the view that: 'Nowadays we may reduce the heights and widths of street-level display windows to form them into a series of separate settings'.³³ Nevertheless, the engineering of the Peter Jones store provided the perfect opportunity for continuous show windows. As the weight of the structure is carried by internal piers and the floors cantilevered out, the outer walls can be glazed continuously. This is particularly useful at ground-floor level as it enables it to have an almost continuous show window with little interruption. The ground-floor, therefore, has large, plate-glass, show windows. The glass is held in metal frames and sills which are fine and simple in section, and which were thought by *The Architect and Building News* in 1936 to 'be the smallest and plainest sections ever used with such large sheets of plate glass'.³⁴

The store is said to have been one of the first London buildings to have a continuous, permanent canopy.³⁵ Previously, such canopies had been banned by the London County Council, but for large show windows a canopy is instrumental in reducing reflections and offering a clear view of the window displays. The canopy is of concrete with a gutter at its outer edge. Originally, flush lights were fitted to its soffit, as was a vertical roller blind, a successor of which is in use, attached immediately behind the gutter. Above the canopy, at the wall plane, continuous, shallow, prismatic glazing, now blocked, allowed natural top-lighting of the show-window display area. The backdrop of the display area, or the cyclorama, rises vertically for the most part but curves outwards at the top so as to abutt the head of the shallow glazing. This and the prismatic glass aids in reflecting light downward onto the window displays. Lighting at the base of the cyclorama allowed it to be lit and coloured as desired and giving it a coating of plaster enabled it to be 'soaked' in light more effectively. Externally, the shallow glazing is headed by a projecting,

continuous flower trough, made of cast-iron with a cast lead apron, which conceals the base of the mullions (Fig. 7).

A photograph published in 1939³⁶ shows the main entrance doors to have been of glass with crossed, diagonal 'glazing bars' creating a latticework effect. The pull handles were vertical bars and a lower panel was made of rubber-faced plywood (Fig. 8). The entrance doors now appear to be of a 1970s metal and glass design.

By the time of the outbreak of the Second World War the two 1930s phases adjoined the rear of the 1889 building and the first trial block was squeezed between Nos. 25 and 29 Cadogan Gardens. It had always been intended that Nos. 25 and 29 Cadogan Gardens would be demolished. In the event No. 25 Cadogan Gardens has survived but its counterpart on the opposite corner, No. 29, was demolished in 1964

and rebuilt in the style of the two earlier, twentieth-century phases. It is noticeable that the concrete has been faced at ground-floor level with a dark grey marble. At the same time, the other entrances were refurbished with this facing (see Fig 4).

Internally, the store was designed to allow for some changes after construction, but essentially it is similar in arrangement today as when it was completed. The west wall of phase one lies parallel to the Sloane Square elevation and is therefore at an angle to phase two, which respects King's Road. Phase two is divided roughly in half by a partition wall running back from King's Road and these walls divided the modern store into three (Fig. 9).



Fig. 7

The Sloane Square elevation, showing the canopy, flower trough and area of the prismatic glazing, now covered



Fig. 8
A photograph showing
the original doors in 1939
*Courtesy of the Architectural
Review*

A vital element in the design of any department store was the provision of open floor areas in which large quantities of goods could be readily displayed. This was essential given the number of customers the buildings accommodated and the variety of departments. For the big stores, there was some prestige to be had in providing an exhaustive list of departments. At its opening in 1909, Selfridges' customers, for example, were offered departments that specialised in everything from handkerchiefs, umbrellas and gramophones to the needs of the clergy. There was a library, a post office, a bank and a barber's shop. For foreign visitors, there were French, German, American and Colonial lounges.³⁷

Such ambition was rather outdated by the 1930s and it seems unlikely that Spedan Lewis would have wanted so many departments anyway. Unfortunately, any detailed arrangements of departments floor by floor, as laid out when the store

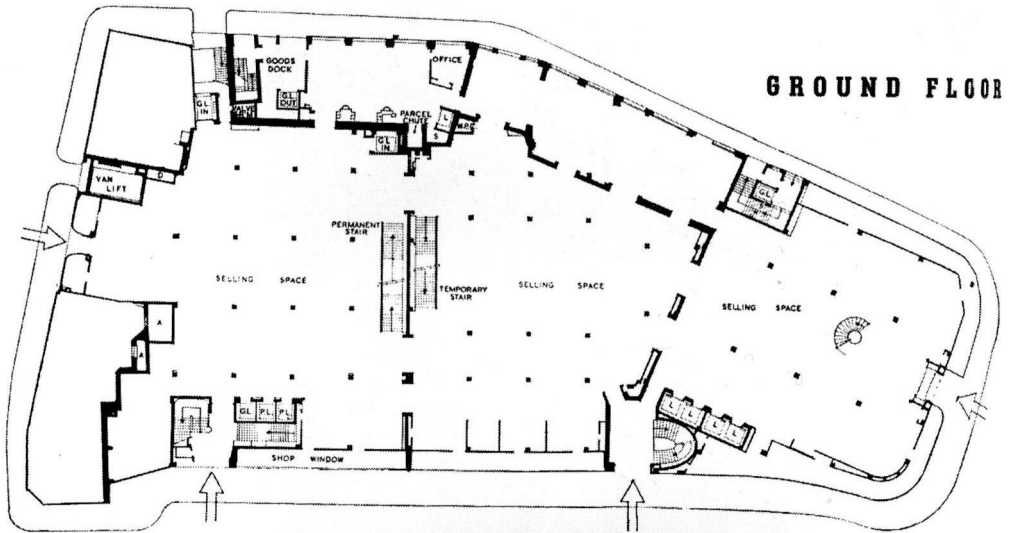


Fig. 9

Ground-floor plan published in 1939 by the *Architectural Review*

opened, has not come to hand, but it might be supposed not to be dissimilar to the present day layout. However, the general outline of the arrangement is known. The ground, first and second floors were devoted entirely to trading. The basement was originally two thirds retail space with the remaining one-third used as a packing area for purchased items which were to be delivered (see below).

The fourth floor was designed to accommodate a stage, with a dance floor and a restaurant (Fig. 10). By 1937, these, along with a hairdressing department, were seen as essential. Louis Blanc, architect of the D. H. Evans department store, commented in the *Architectural Design and Construction* of that year that 'hairdressing departments for both men and women must be provided, also restaurants and in some cases ballrooms'.³⁸ A hairdressing department was incorporated into the first phase, as shown on the plans published in 1936,³⁹ and was improved and extended in 1937.⁴⁰ The fourth floor also contained a fur room. This was a store and a workroom that provided a bespoke service for re-styling fur garments.⁴¹ Sadly much of this has been swept away. The stage has survived and its presence resulted in the west-side doorway off the stairwell, which led directly onto the stage, being around one meter higher than its neighbour. The stage and original restaurant area are now used as shop floor with the restaurant accommodated at the east end (Fig. 11).

The sixth floor was devoted to workrooms, staff restaurant and rest rooms, whilst the top floor was designed to contain squash courts and a swimming pool, although the swimming pool was never built. Some early stores, Harvey Nichols for example, had staff accommodation at upper floor levels. The nineteenth-century Peter Jones store had also⁴² but by the late 1930s this was outdated.



Fig. 10

The restaurant and stage
in 1939

Courtesy of the Architectural Review



Fig. 11

The restaurant and stage in
1998. The proscenium arch has
been removed and an upper
floor balcony partitioned off

Although drawings published in 1936⁴³ show light wells in each of the three main areas of the store, in fact a light well in phase one was never built. In this way the Peter Jones store highlights the changing fashion at that time. In the early purpose-built stores, natural light was seen to be essential for lighting the sales-floor displays. Due to the size and depth of the buildings, interior courts, capped with skylights, and light-wells were necessary. Artificial lighting was important because of the long opening hours, but gas and early electric lighting was of poor quality. By the 1930s, however, improvements in artificial lighting were being developed. In anticipation of these, the constructional steelwork of the Peter Jones store was calculated so that the light wells could be floored over at a later date if it was necessary.⁴⁴ On the other hand, light wells have other important functions. They give a sense of space and, in addition, the glimpse of goods on another level afforded by the tiers of continuous balconies encourages customers to move from floor to floor. Thus, the sense of being at an exhibition, traded upon by the Bon Marché in the middle of the nineteenth century, was still recognised as a valuable marketing tool in the 1930s (Fig. 12).

It is important for department stores to encourage the customer to visit the whole building and in this the positioning of lifts and stairs is important. At Peter Jones, like most stores, the design clustered stairs and lifts around the customer entrances with additional stairs situated centrally in both phase one and phase two. The original staff entrance, now moved, was situated on Symons Street at the junction of the 1895 and the modern store, and also had associated stairs and a lift. The original lifts were supplied by Waygood Otis Ltd. There are two main banks of lifts, one of four, in phase one, and one of three, in phase two, both adjacent to the respective King's Road entrances. The spaces between the doors were used to accommodate showcases and a back-lit store directory. The door reveals were faced with linoleum and the doors themselves were different colours on each floor (Fig. 13). The lifts have since been refurbished, as might be expected.

Adjacent to the Cadogan Gardens entrance is a doorway to what at first appears to be a standard goods lift, but which was installed as a van lift. The intention of this was to have electric shuttle vans that could be taken by the lift directly to the packing department in the basement and loaded with goods immediately they were sold. The goods were then to be taken to a central despatch building in Draycott Avenue.⁴⁵ It was hoped that this would reduce traffic congestion around the store and speed up despatch of goods to the customer.

The stairs in the store are finished with terrazzo and the walls were lined with linoleum, now removed. A feature of interest that was original to the store is a spiral stair that leads from the ground to the first floor in phase one. No mention of it is made by the *Architect and Building News* review of 1936 and it must be assumed that it was added during construction work for phase two. Given William Crabtree's admiration for Erich Mendelsohn, it is tempting to see the inspiration for the staircase as being the spiral staircase at the De La Warr pavilion, completed in 1935. As already noted, a store constructed around light wells invites the customer to move up and down the store by offering views of the other tiers of the building.



Fig. 12
The central
light well at
first-floor level



Fig. 13
The lifts in 1939
*Courtesy of the
Architectural
Review*



Fig. 14
The spiral staircase in phase one

However, where there is no such encouragement other means must be found and this may well have been the reasoning behind the spiral staircase. *The Architectural Review* described it as, 'a new departure in customer temptation [which] attracts by its openness'⁴⁶ (Fig. 14).

The stair is made of steel tubes and sheets with a stainless steel handrail. Now white, it was originally finished in red and cream, with red rubber facings to the risers.⁴⁷ Within the core of the stair, four steel, tubular uprights carry a series of circular, glazed display shelves. The idea of associating stairs

and display was also used on the other feature staircase, the semi-elliptical staircase that leads from the ground floor down to the basement in phase one. Here a series of stepped shelves, now removed, outside the outer handrail provided an opportunity for displays of goods (Fig. 15).

At present, escalators are positioned one on each side of the cross wall that divides phase one. This, however, is not as it was originally conceived. It was considered that customers would prefer lifts to escalators and because of this, staircases were installed instead.⁴⁸ *The Architectural Review* in commenting about the omission of escalators from the store, was of the opinion that, 'the sex which chiefly inhabits large stores has until recently not felt particularly attracted towards

moving stairways'.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the likelihood of installing escalators in the near future was recognised and Crabtree would have been well aware that Mendelsohn was installing them in his stores in Germany. To allow for their later insertion, the east-side stairs were constructed of pressed steel so that they could be easily removed and replaced with an escalator, as indeed they were.⁵⁰ Later, the west side stairs were converted too, and extended to the fourth floor which was not originally served from this point.

Original fixtures and fittings on the whole do not survive. However, notable survivors include the inner wooden entrance and stair doors and light switches in the



Fig. 15

The King's Road entrance staircase in phase one

phase one stairwell off King's Road. The stairs seems to be intact, although the plastic covering of the handrails may be a later feature. It is possible that the original floor finishes survive. This was one-inch deal boards at all the upper floor levels except for the restaurant which was laid with oak as it doubled as a dance floor. The retail areas at ground-floor level were of Tasmanian Oak but this was soon covered with carpet runners because it was wearing badly.⁵¹

A pneumatic tube system which carried customers' accounts to the sanctioning department is no longer apparent but may survive concealed. According to *The Architectural Review*, the account was borne in a container by means of air suction from the sales department to the sanction office on the third floor, carried on a moving belt to the authoriser, and when approved was returned to the sales department all in the space of a few seconds.⁵²

CONCLUSION

The building of the Peter Jones store coincided with a sea-change for the British department store. Until the 1920s, department stores were a huge success and the major stores found business so good that they needed to expand their premises. However, the financial uncertainties of the second quarter of the century ushered in a period of reorganisation and mergers. Debenhams took over Marshall and Snelgrove in 1919 and began talks with Harvey Nichols in the same year, to the same end. Around the same time Harrods took over Dickins and Jones in Regent Street and Barkers acquired Derry and Toms, and Pontings. By 1950, Debenhams comprised eighty-four companies with 110 stores and assets of £36,000,000.⁵³ Post-war Britain had around 700 department stores employing around 130,000 people. Yet the department stores found themselves to have increasing competition. The multiples and chain stores began to eat into their market and expand; invigorated by the free-planning atmosphere of a rebuilding country.⁵⁴

The Peter Jones store reflects the changing times in a number of ways. In its architectural style it is committed to the mid-twentieth century, but the concrete mullions of the trial phase are an indication that the original intention was for the engineering of the building to be not as advanced as it finally was. Ironically, although the store was the catalyst for further exploration of the curtain wall, the post-war department stores found little use for the technology, becoming instead more concerned with minimising fenestration and thus maximising the use that could be made of the walls for internal display. Mendelsohn's department stores may have been the inspiration, but his view of their functional nature was not adopted. Crabtree was, perhaps, bound to heed the views of his employer rather than his mentor. So, the upper and middle class trappings associated with the early-twentieth century stores – the ballroom, fur room, etc. were retained, whereas the post-war department stores, beginning to look more and more to the lower social strata for customers, discarded them. The store was also caught in a middle ground when it came to technology. Its design anticipated improved artificial lighting but was not yet able to incorporate it. Light wells were adopted in part of the store but the engineering design allowed for them to be floored over. Escalators were not seen as desirable but the form of the staircases facilitated their introduction at a later date. It is inevitable with cutting edge design that it will be part of a cycle of change but it is interesting to see how even a modern building can throw light on social changes too.

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NOTES

1. *The Architects' Journal*, 210:9 (4 March 1999), 11.
2. *The Architectural Review*, 85.II (1939), 291.
3. *The Architect and Building News* (June 26, 1936), 377.
4. Girouard, M., *Life in the English Town* (1990), 228.
5. RCHME Survey of London, *Harvey Nichols Department Store and Woollands Department Store*, unpublished draft reports (1998).
6. For a full discussion of the social history of department stores, see Whiting, G., *Department Store* (1979).
7. Pevsner, N., *A History of Building Types* (1976), 270.
8. *Ibid.*
9. Macpherson, H., ed., *John Spedan Lewis 1885-1963* (1985), 148.
10. All these background details are taken from Weinreb, B., and Hibbert, C., eds., *The London Encyclopaedia* (1983), 419, and Walker, A., and Jackson, P., *Kensington & Chelsea* (1987), 178-81.
11. *The Architectural Review*, 187 (January 1990), 79.
12. James, K., *Erich Mendelsohn and the Architecture of German Modernism* (1997), 173.
13. For a full discussion of Mendelsohn's work see James, K., *op. cit.* n. 12.
14. Johnston, E., 'William Crabtree 1905-1991', *The Architectural Review*, 1133 (July 1991), 9.
15. Walker, A., and Jackson, P., *op. cit.* n. 10, 180.
16. *The Architectural Review*, *op. cit.* n. 2.
17. Walker, A., and Jackson, P., *op. cit.* n. 10, 179.
18. *The Architect and Building News* (April 4, 1957), 429.
19. *The Architectural Review*, *op. cit.* n. 11.
20. Yeomans, D., 'The Pre-History of the Curtain Wall', *Construction History*, 14 (1998), 62.
21. *The Architectural Review*, *op. cit.* n. 11.
22. For a full discussion of the technical development of the curtain wall, see Yeomans, D., *op. cit.* n. 20.
23. *The Architectural Review*, *op. cit.* n. 11.
24. *The Architectural Review*, *op. cit.* n. 2, 295.
25. Hamilton, S. B., et al., 'A Qualitative Study of Some Buildings in the London Area', *National Buildings Studies Special Reports*, 33 (November 1964), 19.
26. *The Architect and Building News* (February 27, 1948), lxxvii-lxxviii.
27. *The Architectural Review*, *op. cit.* n. 2, 295.
28. *The Architectural Review*, 79.II (1936), 269.
29. RCHME Survey of London, *Woollands Department Store*, unpublished draft report (1998).
30. *The Warehouseman and Drapers' Trade Journal* (18 January 1873) in RCHME Survey of London, *Harvey Nichols Department Store*, unpublished draft report (1998).
31. *Ibid.*, 144.
32. *The Architect and Building News* (August 26, 1927), 342.
33. *Architectural Design and Construction*, 7 (1936-7), 269.
34. *The Architect and Building News*, *op. cit.* n. 3.
35. *Ibid.*, 380.
36. *The Architectural Review*, *op. cit.* n. 2.
37. Honeycombe, G., *Selfridges* (1984), 12.
38. *Architectural Design and Construction*, *op. cit.* n. 33, 265.
39. *The Architect and Building News*, *op. cit.* n. 3, 378.
40. Information supplied by the John Lewis archive.
41. *Ibid.*
42. *Ibid.*
43. *The Architect and Building News*, *op. cit.* n. 3, 378.
44. *Ibid.*, 379.
45. *The Architectural Review*, *op. cit.* n. 2, 298.
46. *Ibid.*

47. *Ibid.*, 296.
48. A plan published in 1936 shows both staircases on the east side of the cross wall, but a plan of 1939 shows one each side: *The Architect and Building News*, *op. cit.* n. 3, 378; *The Architectural Review*, *op. cit.* n. 2, 294.
49. *The Architectural Review*, *op. cit.* n. 2, 294.
50. *Ibid.*
51. Hamilton, S. B., *et al.*, *op. cit.* n. 25, 22.
52. *The Architectural Review*, *op. cit.* n. 2, 298.
53. Corina, M., *Fine Silks and Oak Counters* (1978), 84 and 140.
54. *Ibid.*

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