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QUEEN ANNE'S GATE

Dan Cruickshank

Queen Anne's Gate is one of the most evocative and most famous of London's 18th-century streets; it is also one of the most mysterious. The general outline of its development is well known but details about the men who financed, designed and built many of the houses remain uncertain. What is certain is that Queen Anne's Gate started life as two separate streets — that to the west being known as Queen Square and that to the east called Park Street. They were divided by a wall (eventually removed in 1873) which originally served two purposes: it marked the division between the two small estates on which the streets were built, and made both into quiet residential enclaves by preventing them being a through route for crowds flocking to the nearby St James's cockpit.

Against the dividing wall, and looking into Queen Square, was a Portland stone statue of Queen Anne, after which the square was evidently named. It survives, set against the flank elevation of 15 Queen Anne's Gate. Queen Square, begun in about 1704, was the later arrival of the two and could lay claim to the title of square by only the merest of town planning devices. It was really no more than a wide court. The houses on the north side of the square seem to have advanced beyond the line of the already-built Park Street houses, although Kip's often unreliable Westminster perspective of about 1710 shows the north sides of Park Street and Queen Square firmly aligned. However, the house forming the south side of the square were most certainly set back behind the south frontage of Park Street.¹ This arrangement meant that the house in the south-east corner of Queen Square could be built with its back to the flank wall of its neighbouring Park Street house and so give Queen Square a rudimentary third side. The fourth side was formed by a terrace of houses running north from Petty France and Tothill Street to St James's Park. These arrangements were just sufficient to give a sense of space and enclosure and to justify the name of square.

Queen Square was built on a parcel of land that had belonged to a Tothill Street Inn called the White Hart. In 1685 the land was acquired by Charles Shales and it was during his ownership that the square was developed. Rate books reveal that the houses in the square were complete and almost fully occupied by 1706, and in 1708 Hatton, in his *New View of London* described the square as "a beautiful New (tho' small) Square, of very fine buildings". In 1713 Shales sold the vastly improved estate to the Hon James Brydges who in turn, in 1720, sold it to Sir Theodore Janssen. Unfortunately, Janssen was a director of the South Sea Company, suffered ruin when the bubble burst in late 1720, and was eventually forced to auction the houses in 1723 for the benefit of the company subscribers. The 24 houses were sold as 13 lots and the square became a very rare thing in 18th-century London — a collection of freeholds rather than leaseholds owned and controlled by a single estate.

This story is told in some detail in the *Survey of London* Vol X (part two) of 1926 but, as the author of the work admits, the name of the designer of the square was "unknown", although its formation is clearly due to Shales. Despite the passing of over 60 years since the Survey volume was published the name of the man responsible for the enterprising layout of the square, and for the remarkable uniformity of the elevations (a most unusual achievement for early-18th-century speculative development in London), remains



Fig. 1. Queen Anne's Gate looking east: the pair of houses in the foreground date from c.1704 and formed the eastern edge of Queen Square. The terrace in the background, now numbered 14-24 Queen Anne's Gate, was built in 1774-76 and formed the north side of Park Street. Number 14, the most distant house, was designed by Samuel Wyatt for Charles Townley.

unknown. Also unknown are the names of the craftsmen and builders involved. This obscurity must largely be due to the early break-up of the estate which resulted in documents being dispersed.

Park Street, to the east of the wall, is a different story. It was built on lands left to Christ's Hospital in 1554 by Richard Castel, a shoemaker of St Margaret's, Westminster, and in 1585 by John Lawrence. In the 16th century these two portions of land were to all intents and purposes a waste, crossed by a large drainage ditch running east to west, and inaccessible between the ancient houses on Tothill Street and the wall of St James's Park to the north. In the late 17th century Christ's Hospital succumbed to the speculative fever that then gripped post-fire London and in the mid 1670s entered into negotiations with various lessees for the development of the estate.²

Park Street and Carteret Street were laid out on the small estate and so connected it to existing thoroughfares. The land between was divided into building plots and developed by the late 1680s. But, it seems, this building enterprise did not go well. As early as 1726 a report on the Park Street estate, commissioned from John Jennings by Christ's Hospital, concluded that £200 needed to be spent on each of the seven large houses forming the north side of Park Street and £60 each on the smaller houses on the south side.³ This was a very large amount of money to spend on the repair of houses only about 40 years old and suggests that the building works must have been of extremely poor quality; for £200 it was, in 1726, quite possible to build an entire, if modest, five-storey terrace house. A subsequent report, compiled by George Tullock in 1752 found that three of the houses on the north side of Park Street had further decayed to the point of being "untenable".⁴



Fig. 2. Johan Zoffany's painting c1781 showing the top-lit atrium-like first-floor "library" of 14 Queen Anne's Gate. Charles Townley is seated on the right, Mr d'Hancarville is seated on the right with, behind him, the Hon. Charles Greville and Thomas Astley (Towneley Hall Art Gallery/Burnley Borough Council).

In 1769 the Court of Christ's Hospital resolved to rebuild the smaller houses on the south side of the street⁵ and took the unusual step of doing this without the intervention of a lessee. Instead it financed and controlled the operation itself using its estate surveyor, Emanuel Crouch, to design the houses and its journeyman carpenter, John Wilkinson Long, to supervise the works. When the houses were completed in about 1771 the Hospital set about letting them on short tenures.⁶ The unfortunate premature decay of the previous speculatively-built houses on the site had, perhaps, made the Hospital nervous of repeating the experiment of working with middlemen. A different course of action was pursued on the north side of the street. Here the ruinous late-17th-century houses were suffered to remain for a few years more, for it was not until 1773 that the redevelopment of these houses was undertaken.⁷

For this redevelopment the Hospital reverted to its earlier, and more conventional, methods. It let the land to a speculative builder on a 61-year lease dated from Lady Day 1774. The builder's name was Michael Barrett. The agreement stipulated that "within 8½ years from the commencement of the lease" Barrett had "to erect and build on the north side of Park Street . . . two or more, but not exceeding ten, substantial brick messuages or tenements".⁸ Barrett also undertook to build two houses on the south side of Park Street and five and a half houses in Carteret Street. The flexibility over the number of houses Barrett could build on the site, and the generous time scale allowed by the Hospital for the construction process were most unusual in late-18th-century London which suggests that Christ's Hospital was more than a little desperate to rebuild.

Barrett decided to replace the seven late-17th-century houses on the north side of the street with the same number of new houses. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly for the date and location, these seven houses were not designed, nor built, as an architecturally coherent composition. They owe nothing to the Adam brothers' palace-fronted terraces of

1768 at the Adelphi, nor do they possess any of the urban pretensions of Stratford Place, being built off Oxford Street to the designs of Richard Edwin at exactly the same time. At this Park Street terrace, the western pair are two-bays wide while the rest of the houses are three-bay, and vertical brick joints between houses reveal that the street was built as at least three structurally separate enterprises.

However, the houses all have several important points in common: their elevations are severe, but handsomely so rather than mean with deep areas of wall between first-floor window heads and second-floor cills suggesting the presence of lofty piano nobile rooms; in plan and detail they are remarkably able and avant-garde essays in neo-Classical design for they all (originally) possessed top-lit oval stairwells placed between back and front rooms — a device which moved the staircase away from the back wall and allowed the creation of wide rear rooms with fine views over St Jame's Park.

The highly-fashionable details and well-contrived plan provoke an obvious question: who was Michael Barrett? Was he a major, but long forgotten, figure in the building world of late-18th-century London? Rate books reveal that he lived in one of the newly-built houses on the south side of Park Street during the construction of the north side,⁹ and recent research confirms that he had a hand in other West End building enterprises.¹⁰ But, perhaps, Michael Barrett's role in the construction of the Park Street houses does not demand a great deal of investigation because his contribution is of relatively minor interest. It seems that Barrett was not responsible for the design of the houses, but acted merely as undertaker of the development and probably as building contractor.

So who did design these unusually elegantly detailed houses? The answer is suggested by a surviving building agreement and schedule of works for 7 Park Street (now 14 Queen Anne's Gate) which names Samuel Wyatt as the designer of that particular house



Fig. 3. Townley's library c1925 (Greater London Record Office).

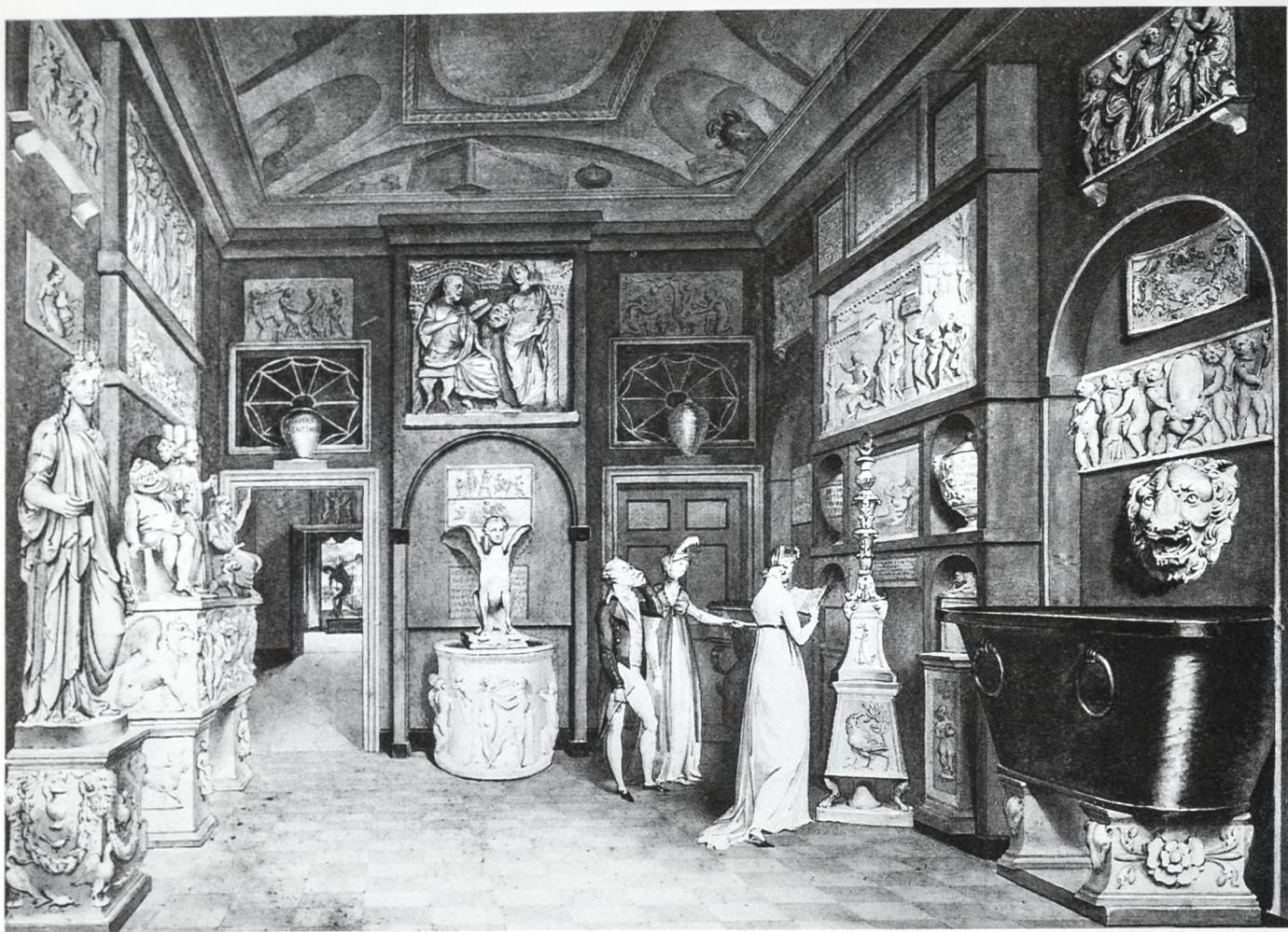


Fig. 4. The entrance hall of 14 Queen Anne's Gate c1793 showing the way in which Townley's antiquities were integrated with the fabric of the house. This watercolour was probably executed by Richard Cosway (Private collection/British Museum Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities).

and Barrett as its builder.¹¹ The question is, did Wyatt design the rest of the houses in the group? To attempt to answer this it is necessary to look into the chronology of the development.

The most westerly of the seven new houses built by Barrett was numbered 1 Park Street (now 24 Queen Anne's Gate) and the most easterly was 7 Park Street (now 14 Queen Anne's Gate). The houses in between are now numbered 22a, 22, 20, 18 and 16. Examination of the façades, and of plans, reveal that 22a and 24 — the pair of two-bay-wide houses — were built as one operation, as were the three-bay-pair of 20 and 22. 18, 16 and 14 also seem to have been built as a group; the brickwork of 18's façade is continuous with that of 16 although their floor levels are different. The plans, and many internal details of 14 and 16 are strikingly similar although the façade of 14 breaks forward beyond that of 16. Examination of the rate books reveal when the houses were first occupied and the dates when Barrett assigned leases to the first occupants.¹² Barrett's involvement with the development seems to have ceased in 1776 when he assigned the 61-year leases of "all those houses, tenements or premises standing . . . on the north side of Park Street" to Richard Henry Alexander Bennett.¹³ In this indenture Barrett is termed esquire suggesting that he had pretensions to be a gentleman and was no ordinary builder. From this information it seems that the construction of the street began with the pair of more modest houses at the west end of the street for these, 22a and 24, were first occupied in 1775-76, with 18 and 20 being occupied in 1778-79, and 14 and 16 in 1777-78. However, the building agreement for 14 implies a slightly different chronology. This document specified the "manner of Building and finishing a House situate in Park Street . . . intended

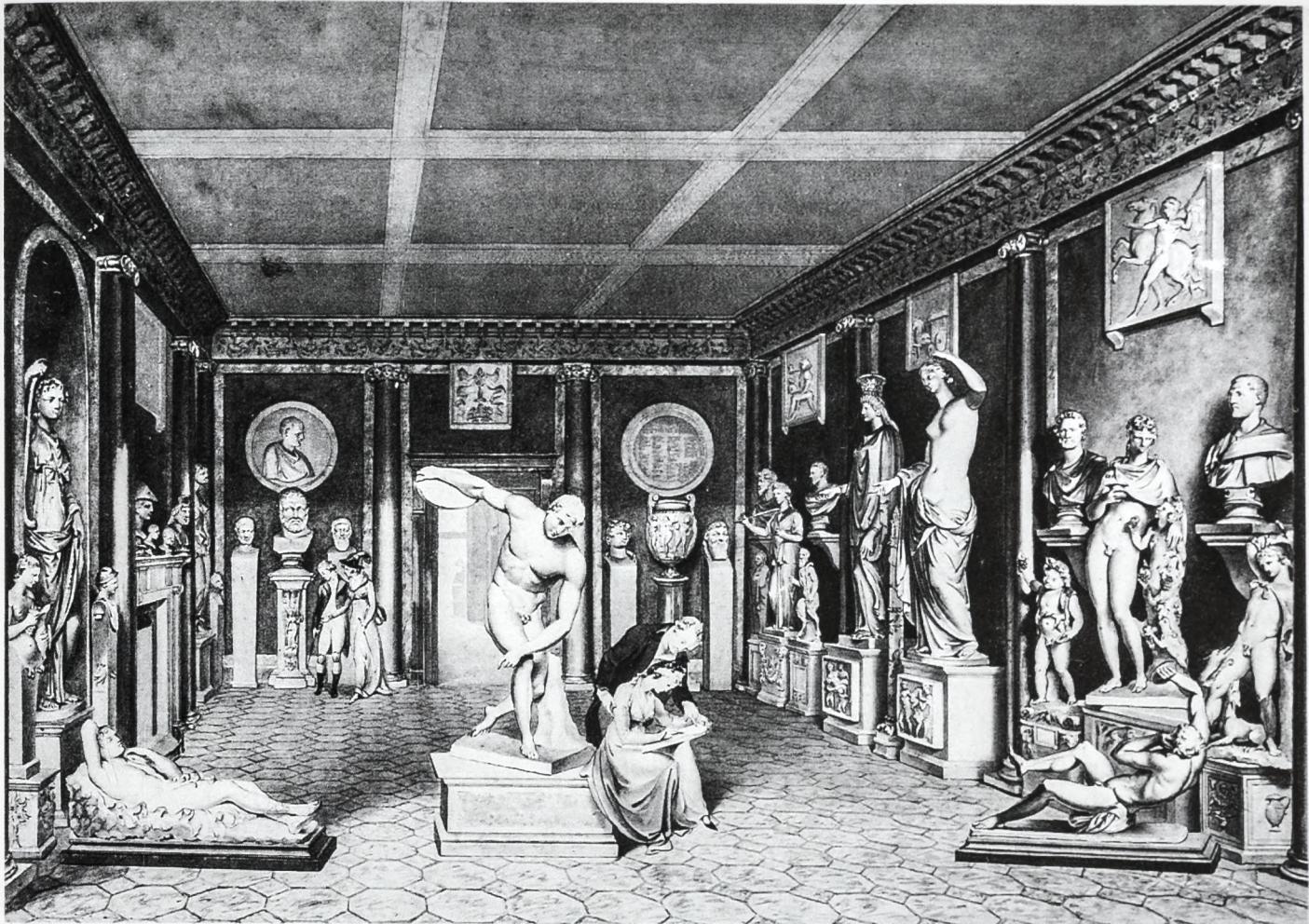
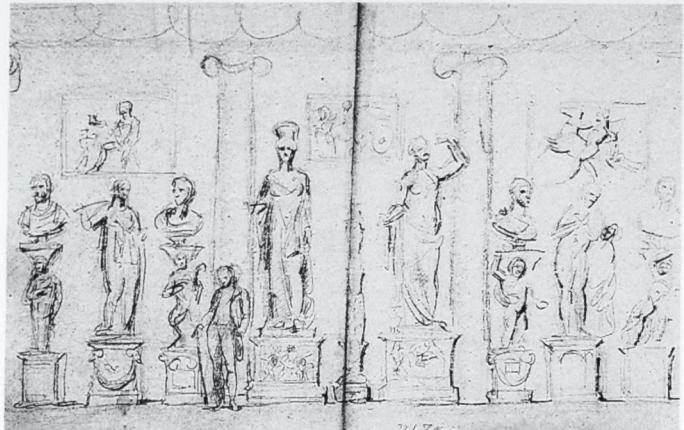
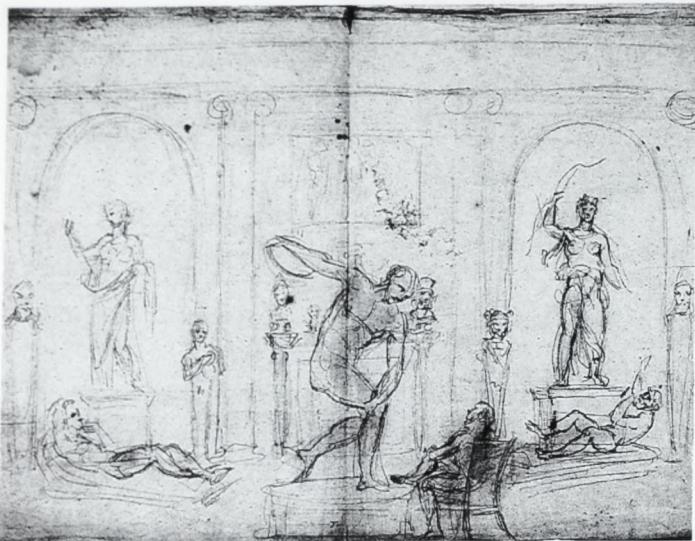


Fig. 5. Watercolour c1793 showing the ground floor rear room in 14 Queen Anne's Gate which served as both dining room and column-clad sculpture gallery (Private collection/British Museum Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities).

to be built for Charles Townley Esq. by Mr Barrett, agreeable to plans made by Saml. Wyatt". The agreement describes the way in which the house was to be built, details the treatment of individual rooms, outlines Barrett's contractual obligations, and requires him to complete the house before September 29, 1776, with the lease assigned to Townley from March 25, 1775. This suggests that the house was designed by late 1775 and could, of course, have been designed a good deal earlier. Townley had returned from his latest Italian tour in 1773 and immediately set about finding a London residence capable of housing his ever-growing collection of antique sculpture. He eventually settled for a house in Crown Street, Westminster, but this could only have been a temporary measure for almost as soon as he moved in he began negotiations for the Park Street site.

So, to summarise, it is possible that 14 Park Street was designed if not built, at a very early stage in the development of the north side of Park Street, and that its builder, Michael Barrett, took it as the inspiration, perhaps the actual model, for the other houses in the street. Indeed, it is possible that Barrett actually commissioned Wyatt to produce designs for the other houses — an involvement that would explain the general high level of design and detailing for Wyatt was one of the more able architects of his generation and fluent in the avant-garde language of neo-Classicism. This contention is supported by 16 Queen Anne's Gate which, in its plan and in many of its internal details as well as in its elevation, is almost an exact copy of number 14. There can be no doubt that Barrett relied upon Wyatt's designs for 14 when building 16 and since structural evidence suggests very strongly that both houses were built as one operation, it is only reasonable to conclude that there was a professional relationship between Barrett and Wyatt independent of their dealings with



Figs. 6 and 7. Sketches of the dining room in 14 Queen Anne's Gate, probably made by Joseph Nollekens (British Museum Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities).

Townley.

It is perhaps necessary at this stage to remove a red herring from the story. The entertaining but unreliable J. T. Smith, who had visited 7 Park Street in the 1790s to study Townley's "marbles", wrote in his memoirs in the 1820s that the house "was purchased by Mr Townley in that state denominated by builders 'a shell' (and) was finished according to his own taste".¹⁴ The latter statement is true, but the former is not. The implication is that Townley bought a house that Barrett had already built. That this was not the case is made clear in the building agreement in which Barrett agrees to build to the designs of Wyatt. This begins with a specification for the construction of the shell with special reference to the elevations. We read that Barrett was to: "build all the walls of the best hard grey stock Bricks, the fore and back fronts to be faced with Malm stocks neatly pointed, with gaged Arches over the windows. Cornices to each front, Blocking course, facia, Window-cills, Coping to wall, steps and Kerbs to Areas, to be of Portland Stone". This makes it pretty clear that Wyatt was responsible for the entire house and not just its plan or interior.

There is also an old attribution of the house to Robert Adam that rewards investigation. This attribution seems to have started in the 1926 Survey of London volume which states that a plan of a house designed by Adam for Townley survives in the Soane Museum. The Survey further states that this plan was for Park Street though concedes that it bears little resemblance to the house as built. The Soane Museum has no record of such a plan, but recent research in the Townley papers throws an interesting light on the Adam connection.¹⁵ It seems that Townley, always thinking of the best way to house and display his growing collection, was much taken by the Adam brothers' development on the corner of Portland Place and Weymouth Street: "He looked over the site, expressed general approval but announced to the foreman that such a plan would be unsuitable for the display of his collection." These observations were passed on to the Adam brothers who took them as a challenge and as an invitation; plans were drawn up and submitted along with a bill. Townley declared that they were unsolicited and from 1777 to '79 "terse" notes were exchanged until Townley finally offered 20gns to end the tiresome affair. This must be the plan referred to in the Survey and so post-dates the Wyatt design for 14 Queen Anne's Gate.

Although 14 and 16 are strikingly similar, they are not identical twins: the rear rooms of 16 are wider than those of 14 causing a curious crank in the party wall, while the rear rooms of 14 are deeper in plan than those of 16. Also, and somewhat inexplicably, their façades do not align, with that of 16 being set about 8ins behind that of 14. Despite

these strange disparities, these houses do form a remarkable, coherent pair. The unusual depth and width of their plots created problems but also opportunities. It was essential to get light into the heart of the house and this Wyatt did by the creation of a generous top-lit oval stairwell placed in the centre of the house plan. This device was pioneered in grand terrace houses in London during the 1760s and so was still a relatively new idea in 1775. This spacious stairwell, like the atrium in the Roman house, acted as a main circulation space, brought daylight right down to ground level in the very centre of the house, and was one of the house's greatest architectural ornaments. In some of the 1770s houses on the north side of Queen Anne's Gate (for example 22a) the light from the stairwell is borrowed by closets on the second floor which, tucked behind bedrooms, present glazed windows to the stairwell which provides their only source of daylight.

The width of the plots of 14 and 16 allowed Wyatt to experiment with an idea that was novel in terrace house design. In 18-24 the centre of the house is occupied by the stairwell alone; at 14 and 16 Wyatt managed to fit in a small room across the landing from the staircase. At ground-floor level these rooms are dark and of an extremely functional nature containing service areas, stairs to the basement and so on. But at first-floor level Wyatt pulled off something of a coup. He decided to raise this central portion of the house no higher and thus created top-lit rooms at first-floor level within the centres of the building. The top lighting, in the form of an oblong skylight placed in the centre of the ceiling, is strongly, and no doubt intentionally, reminiscent of Roman atria; this pair of



Fig. 8. The dining room c1925. Neither the ceiling decoration nor the chimney piece tally with the 1790s illustrations (Greater London Record Office).

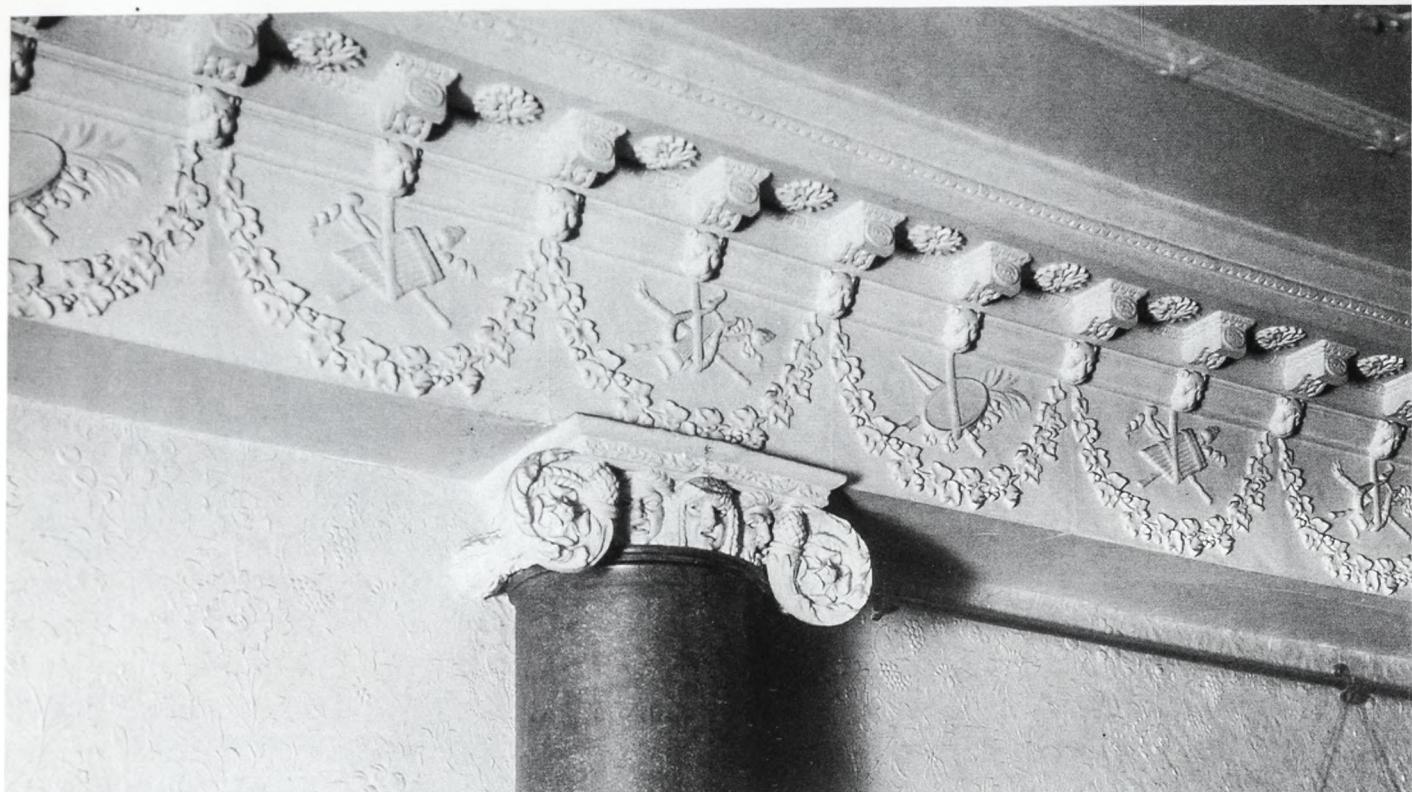


Fig 9. Detail of the dining room capital and entablature c1925. D'Harcanville described the frieze as being "ornamented with festoons of Ivy, the trophyes composed of the instruments used in orgies" while the capitals bare the "three masks representing three kinds of ancient drama, the comic, tragic and satyric" (Greater London Record Office).

rooms in 14 and 16 are amongst the very earliest top-lit rooms created in the 18th-century.¹⁶ Stopping this central portion of the house at first-floor level also had the advantage of creating an open well from which second- and third-floor inner rooms and closets could obtain natural light and ventilation.

The role of the client in the development of the unusual plan must not be overlooked for Charles Townley was one of the leading antiquaries of the late-18th-century with a large collection of Greek and Roman sculpture that was eventually acquired by the British Museum. Indeed, the building was intended to be as much a museum as a house with the ground- and first-floor rooms not only dominated by the objects they contained but with a large number of antiquities actually built into the fabric of the house. No doubt the antique feel of the interior, and the overt reference to the Roman house, had much to do with Townley's desire to present his collection in what he saw as an appropriate setting. It is significant that Townley's first biographer, James Dallaway, should observe that the rooms of the house were of "an arrangement so classically correct, and with accompaniments so admirably selected, that the interior of a Roman villa might be inspected in our own metropolis".¹⁷ The first-floor "atrium" room was described by Smith as Townley's library and "highly interesting" because it was "lighted from above" (Figs. 2 and 3).¹⁸ Smith observed that this was an excellent room for study, and it was here that Townley had himself, three friends and the choice objects of his collection painted by Zoffany in 1781-83. But the most important display room was the ground-floor rear room, described in the building agreement schedule as the dining parlour (Fig. 5). It was in this room that Townley placed his statues of Ceres and Bacchus, together with a Venus masquerading as "Ariadne naked to the waist", for he displayed the collection according to themes and these fertility and Bacchanalian works were thought appropriate for the dining room. Despite the number and size of the objects on display, Townley did also manage to dine in the room. As Smith wrote, it was here that "Mr Townley . . . entertained

personages of the highest rank in this kingdom, as well as visitors from all nations who were eminent for the brilliancy of their wit or their literary acquirements.” It was also here that he held his celebrated and less formal Sunday dinners which “were principally for professors of the Arts; and Sir Joshua Reynolds and Zoffany generally enlivened the circle”.¹⁹

The architectural treatment of this room is particularly interesting for it continues the tradition of the renaissance sculpture gallery or the peristyle court in the Roman house with its walls lined with engaged columns rising the full height from floor to the soffit of a richly detailed entablature (Fig. 9). Mr d’Hancarville, an antiquary of dubious character, friend of Townley’s and one of the subjects in Zoffany’s painting of the library, described the intentions behind the design of the room: “The aim in the decoration of this room was principally to recal the eye in particular upon each of the marbles which it contains, and for that end it is attempted to fix the view betwixt the spaces shut in by the columns, which being of a dark colour, prevents the sight from wandering upon too many objects at once. These columns appearing dark upon a blue ground, calculated to bring out the marbles, prevents their being confused with objects adjoining. This disposition does not take from the room the character of what it was destined for, the use of the table; all the ornaments are relative to the attributes of those Gods, who are supposed by the antients to preside over the festive board. The Ionic columns in Scagliola, perfectly resembling porphyry, support an entablature, the frieze of which is ornamented with festoons of ivy, the trophy composed of the instruments used in orgies. The capitals of the columns are taken from an ancient model found at Terracina; the ove is covered with three masks representing three kinds of ancient drama, the comic, tragic and satyric, supported by a bead of pearls; the abacus is ornamented with an Ivy branch; the volutes form a cornucopia, from whence

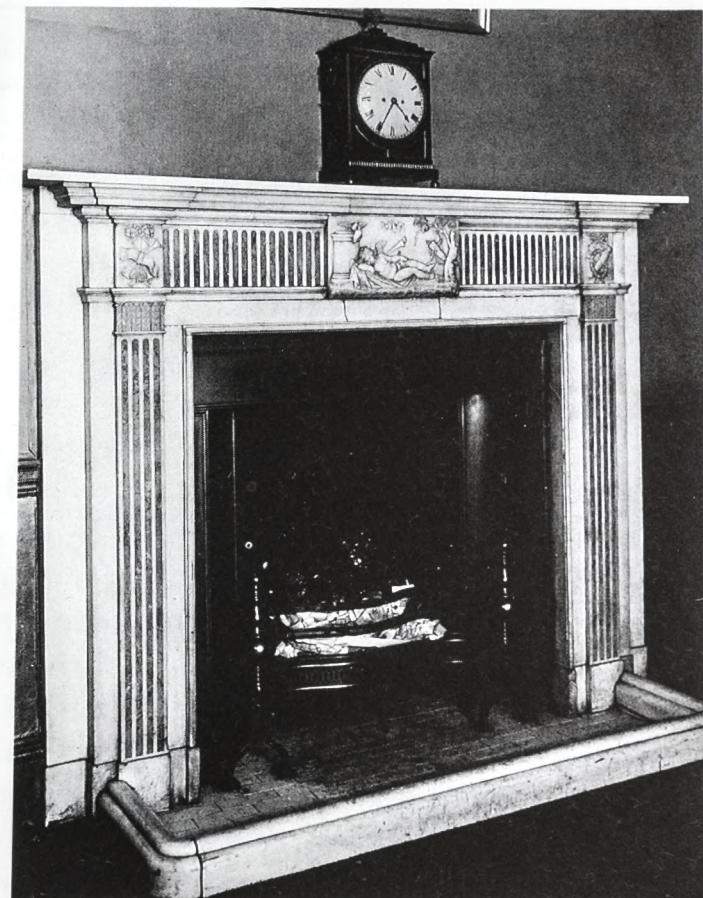
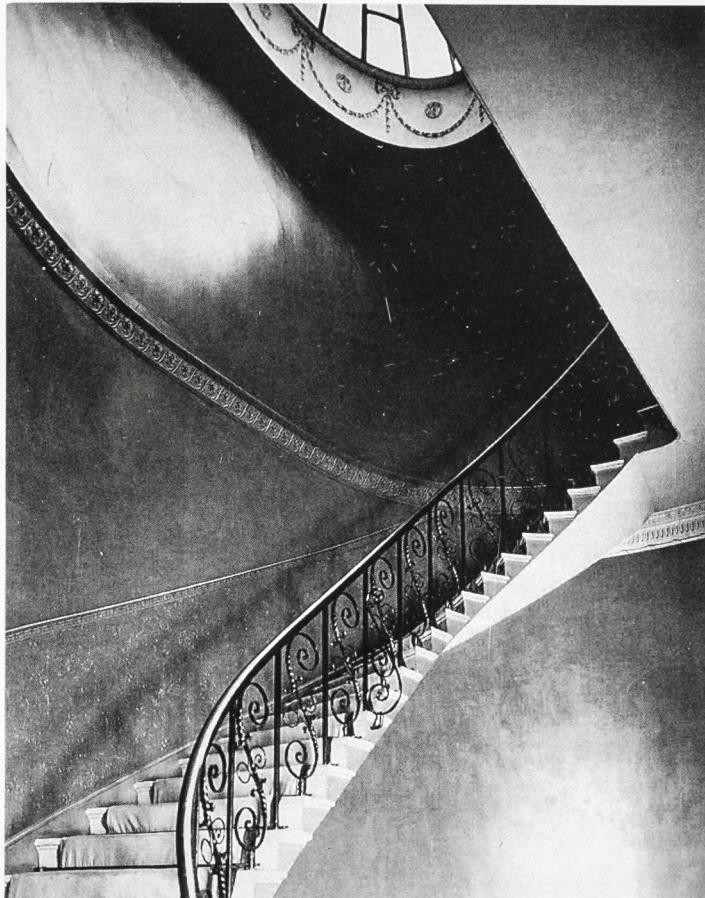


Fig. 10. The upper portion of the top-lit oval stair in 14 Queen Anne’s Gate photographed c1925 (Greater London Record Office).

Fig. 11. Chimneypiece in the first-floor rear room in 17 Queen Anne’s Gate c1925. This was one of the items Townley had to “find” under the terms of his building agreement with Michael Barrett (Greater London Record Office).

usher forth ears of Corn and Ivy leaves, plants consecrated to Bacchus and Ceres; a flower forms the eye of the volute, which terminates in a Pine cone. The choice and disposition of these ornaments leave no doubt that this capital was intended to characterise a building consecrated to Bacchus and Ceres, whose feasts and Mysteries were celebrated together in the famous Temple of Eleusis.”²⁰

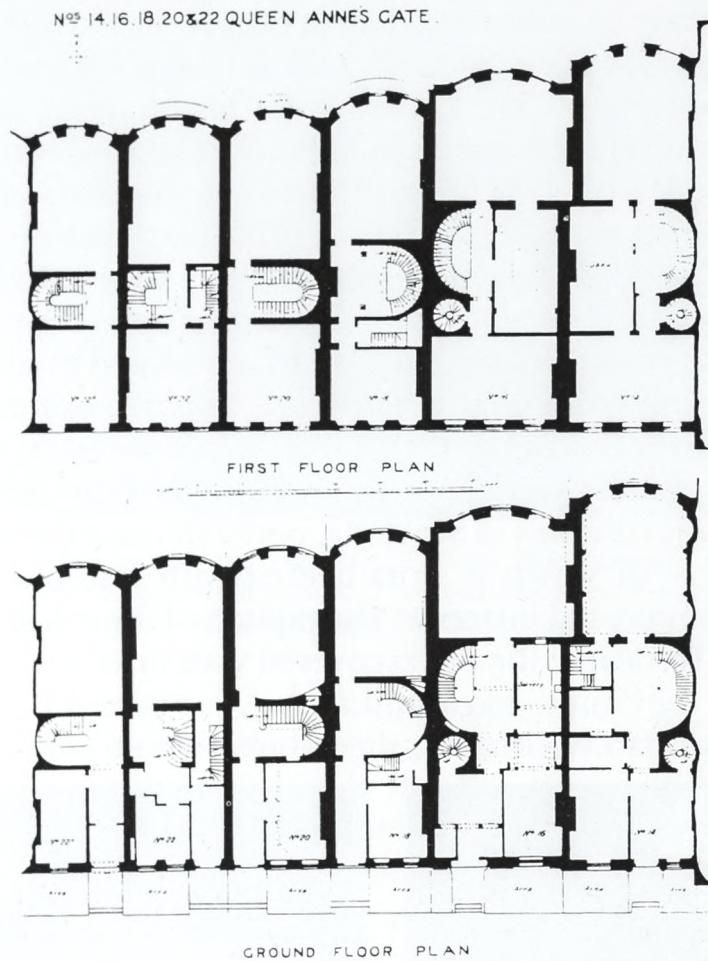


Fig. 12. Ground and first floor plans of 14-22a Queen Anne's Gate taken from the *Survey of London* Volume X (1926).

Included within the building agreement between Townley and Barrett is a section relating to the cost of constructing the house which records certain areas which Townley was “to finish at his own expense”, namely “From the Cornish to the floor of the Saloon”. Responsibility for furnishing and paying for the fire surrounds was divided between Townley and Barrett. The former was, by this agreement, “to find and finish the Chimney pieces for the drawing room floor and back dining Parlour”,²¹ (Fig. 11) while Barrett’s fee was to include “finishing” the “other principal Rooms with plain marble Chimney pieces and plain wood Mouldings the best with Portland stone”.

For his works Barrett was to be paid £3,650 “in the manner following . . . £500 when he shall have built the said house to the dining room floor — another sum of £1,000 when the said house shall be covered in, and the remainder when the said Michael Barrett shall have completely finished the said house according to the above agreement”. In return Barrett was, after completing the works, to assign to Townley the remaining 60 year lease at a clear yearly ground-rent of 45gns.

A footnote in Townley’s hand, and seemingly written after the completion of construction, records the main additional costs: “The house in Park Street according to Mr Wyatt’s plan completely finished with best materials, plain mouldings and ceilings for

£3,500; Difference of Stone staircase and flaggs £150; Finishing the Saloon complete additions £130; Addition of two feet in the whole width of the house £260." This made the final cost of the house £4,040 a colossal sum considering that the cost of constructing a "common London house" in the mid 18th century was, according to Isaac Ware in his *Complete Body of Architecture* of 1756, somewhere between £600 and £700, while it is estimated that the houses built by Christ's Hospital on the north side of Queen Anne's Gate in 1770-71 cost between £550 and £650 to construct.

NOTES

1. John Rocque's map of 1746 shows Queen Square and Park Street aligned on both their north and south sides. This must be an error.
2. Survey of London X (Part 2), 78-81.
3. Christ's Hospital archives at the Guildhall Library, City of London. CHA 13709.
4. CHA 13083.
5. CHA 128000.
6. See appendix two in Dan Cruickshank and Neil Burton, *Life in the Georgian City*, London, 1990.
7. Christ's Hospital Tenancy agreement book, CHA 12853.
8. Minutes of Committee of Rentors, October 8, 1773.
9. The Rate books show Michael Barrett residing at 13 Queen Anne's Gate in 1777. See Survey of London volume X (Part 2), 99.
10. Barrett's name appears on the rate books for at least three houses in Grafton Street, Piccadilly from about 1772 to 1786. Grafton Street was designed by Sir Robert Taylor, while Barrett may have had a financial interest or acted as building contractor. See Marcus Binney, *Sir Robert Taylor*, London, 1984, 64. Information from Richard Garnier.
11. Photocopy lodged in English Heritage Blue plaque file for 14 Queen Anne's Gate. Original among Townley probate documents at Lambeth Palace Library.
12. Survey of London X, 88-96.
13. Greater London Records Office, Middlesex Deeds Register, MDR/3/450.
14. J. T. Smith, *Nollekens and his Times*, 1986, 169.
15. Gerard Vaughan is a leading authority on Charles Townley and his collection and has amassed information on Townley's building activities from examination of the Townley papers in the British Museum and elsewhere. Much of his research is unpublished. This information is lodged in the English Heritage Blue plaque file on 14 Queen Anne's Gate.
16. Robert Adam's oculis-lit pantheon-inspired sculpture gallery at Newby Hall, Yorkshire, was designed in 1767, but Sir John Soane's pioneering lantern-roofed, top-lit gallery added to Fonthill was not designed until 1787.
17. James Dallaway "Biographical Memoirs of the late Charles Townley", *The General Chronicle and Literary Magazine*, 1812, 284.
18. Smith, 168.
19. *Ibid.*, 164, 166.
20. This description, in French (copied in Townley's hand) with an English translation, is among the Townley papers in the British Museum and is quoted in B. C. Cook's *The Townley Marbles*, 1985.
21. Gerard Vaughan's research reveals that the scagliola work at Park Street was carried out by the firm of John Richter and Dominick Bartoli, and that at least one chimneypiece was carved by the sculptor Richard Haywood, see fn 15.
22. See note 6.