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NEW LIGHT ON A GEORGIAN TOWN HOUSE: NO. 76 SOUTH AUDLEY STREET, MAYFAIR

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No 76 South Audley Street, situated close to Hyde Park in the fashionable parish of St George, Hanover Square, was an imposing five-storey town house which occupied the corner plot with Dean Street, now Deanery Street (Fig. 1). It was built on undeveloped land belonging to the Dean and Chapter of Westminster shortly before the expansion of the Grosvenor estate immediately to the north. No documentary evidence of the builder's identity has come to light; it was completed, however, by 1739–40, when the speculative builder/ architect Edward Shepherd (d.1747) was first recorded as paying the freehold rent and rates.¹ In 1970, after

years of neglect, it was demolished to make way for a modern office block which, for a contemporary steel and glass structure, is strangely in accord with the building that it replaced. Fortunately, some interior photographs were taken prior to its demise. These are significant in that they illustrate the rich and glorious plasterwork which was, stylistically at least, similar to other known examples in houses built by Shepherd. These interior photographs are published here for the first time, and the article will also discuss the history of the house which, since it was not on the Grosvenor estate, was not included in the *Survey of London* volumes on Mayfair.



Fig. 1. No. 76 South Audley Street. *City of London, London Metropolitan Archives.*

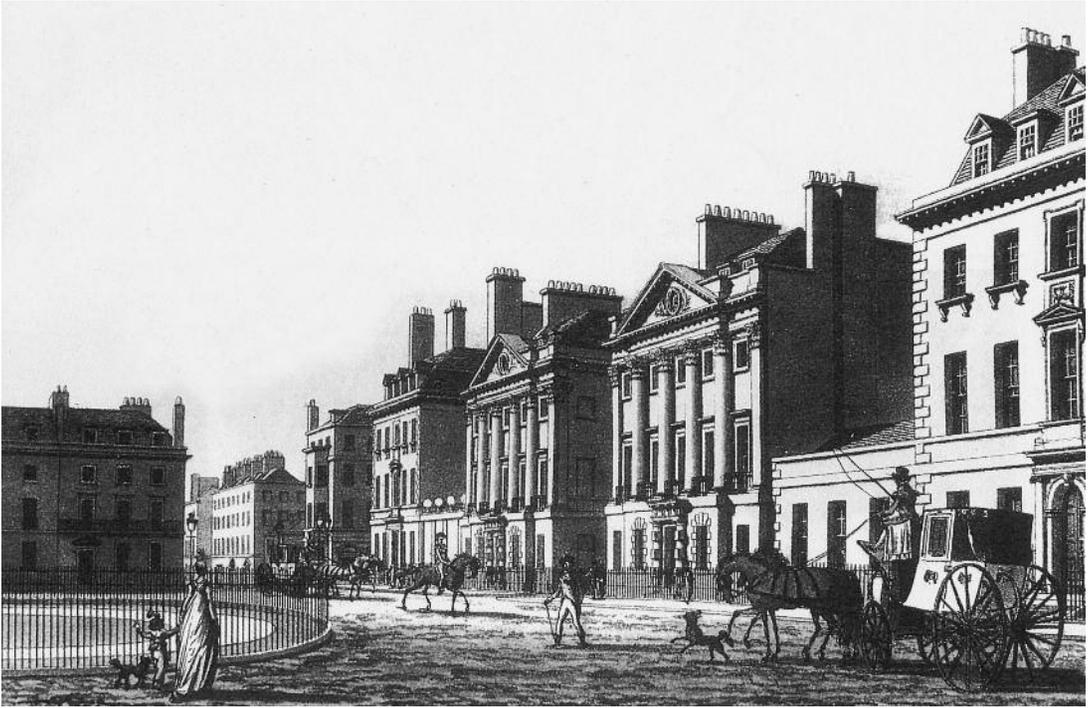


Fig. 2. Thomas Malton Jnr, *Cavendish Square*, 1800, aquatint. No. 79 Harley Street with the canted bay window can be seen on the far side of Cavendish Square. The two houses alongside the central pedimented buildings were built by Edward Shepherd.

The rate book evidence and the character of the plasterwork suggest that No. 76 was built by Edward Shepherd, although whether as a temporary structure or permanent dwelling we cannot tell. A plasterer by trade, he was one of the most successful speculative builders of his generation. In 1735 he had been engaged on the building of Shepherd's Market (now Shepherd Market) in nearby Curzon Street and within three years it was said that he owned 'many of the buildings about Mayfair'.² His life and career have been documented by Victor Belcher and the late Sir Howard Colvin, but some new pieces of information can now be added to the canon.³ First, while in residence at No. 76, he was granted a lease by Lord Berkeley to build on land at Brick Close or Hill Field, immediately to the south of South Audley Street, and

another by Sir Nathaniel Curzon for a corner plot on Curzon Street.⁴ Second, a lease of 1824 suggests more of his speculative dealings, with the lands to the east and west of No. 76 being 'formerly granted to Michael Angelo Taylor and George Richards trustees of Elizabeth Jane Howell Shepherd'.⁵

No. 76 was the first house outside the southern boundary of the Grosvenor estate. Its corner position and canted-bay-windowed construction would have been ideal to oversee Shepherd's building works at Nos. 71-5 South Audley Street, immediately to the north. Curiously, an almost identical bay-windowed house, identified on Richard Horwood's 1799 map of London as being No. 79 Harley Street, once stood on the corner of Cavendish Square and Harley Street (Fig. 2).⁶ This house was probably built between



Fig. 3. George Romney, *Mary Bold of Bold Hall in Cheshire later Mrs Mary Hunt (1739–1824)*.
© NTPL/John Hammond.



Fig. 4. Thomas Hudson, *Thomas Hunt (1721–88) of Mollington Hall in Cheshire*.
© NTPL/John Hammond.

1725, when two ratepayers were recorded in the square, and 1730, when the figure rose to seventeen, one of whom was a Francis Shepherd.⁷ Comparably positioned to No. 76 South Audley Street, and equally unattractive externally, this would have been ideally placed to observe his work in Cavendish Square for his early patron James Brydges, first Duke of Chandos (1673–1744). It is noteworthy that both properties are strikingly out of kilter with their neighbours and make no attempt to blend into the streetscape, which may suggest they were intended as temporary offices.

Shepherd's widow Elizabeth ran his business until her own death in 1761 although it is unclear whether or not this was from No. 76 South Audley Street.⁸ In 1768 Thomas Hunt (1721–88) of

Mollington Hall in Cheshire (dem. 1938) and his bride of three years, Mary Bold of Bold Hall near Liverpool (dem. 1899), were first recorded as the ratepayers (Figs. 3 & 4).⁹ This was an inspired choice of town house for a member of the rising social elite. Thomas Hunt was distantly related to the Duke of Chandos through the marriage of Henry Booth, first Earl of Warrington (1652–94) of Dunham Massey, Cheshire, and Mary Langham (d. 1691), so it is possible that he knew Shepherd's widow.¹⁰

On her husband's death, Mrs Mary Hunt inherited Mollington Hall, the Hunt town houses and his Cambridgeshire estate.¹¹ She moved to No. 16 Upper Seymour Street but honoured the rate payments at No. 76 between 1788 and 1793 when tenants occupied the house, the most notable being



Fig. 5. John Claude Nattes, c.1800, *Dean Street, Hill Street & South Audley Street*. Looking along Dean Street with No. 76 South Audley Street (with balcony) on the right with No. 1 Dean Street alongside. *City of Westminster Archives Centre*.

Lady Williams Wynne who paid the rates in 1793–94.¹² Once Mollington Hall had been sold, No 76 once again became Mrs Hunt's home from 1796 until her death in 1824. Living at such an affluent address so close to the fashionable Grosvenor estate would have allowed her every prospect to outline both her personal position and her public function within the community.¹³ Her status may well have ensured that her London town house and its interiors conformed to the Georgian model of propriety and prosperity, yet despite some obvious Adamesque decoration (Figs. 9 & 10), no record survives to suggest any significant architectural embellishments.

The reasons for such a want of beautification at her Mayfair home may well have been due to the deterioration of her health although, judging by the loans given by her daughter, it would seem that she

was in some financial straits. Living in London was certainly costly, and keeping a Mayfair home was, for many, financially prohibitive.¹⁴ In the weeks before her death Mrs Hunt paid out in taxes alone £1 11s for her male servants, £1 3s 6d for hair powder and £3 duty on her four-wheeled carriage. Window tax for 37 windows amounted to £6 7s 8d, house tax for £14 3s 4d, duty for armorial bearings for £1 4s and parish taxes – church rate, poor and highway rates, paving, repairing, cleansing and lighting and watching rates totalled £9 7s for two quarters.¹⁵ Some other significant costs were the hire of her four-wheeled carriage, costing £67 8s; the yearly rent for her pew in the Grosvenor Chapel – £6 16s 6d; water rates from the Office of Grand Junction Water Works at Brook Street – £3 3s; and the watering of South Audley Street – £1 1s.¹⁶

With the grandeur of the Grosvenor estate to the north and the newer darkened brick terraced housing to the south, No. 76 did not fit very happily into its surroundings. Like No. 79 Harley Street, it was unusual in that it had an external stucco finish, perhaps intended to cover up the temporary nature of the construction. A recipe for ‘Green Wash for Stucco’ addressed to Mrs Hunt survives in the Lanhydrock archive:

Take 4 pounds of blue vitriol one pound of Spanish white and boil them an hour in three quarts of water, put them in a pot to settle 4 or 5 days draining the water from them every morning. Take half a pound of glue and three penny worth of isinglass, boil them in three pints of water until dissolved and mix them with vitriol and Spanish white. Lay it on with a soft brush warm stirring it well together. It will require being done over two or three times with the mixture as the mixture will ferment very much. NB. The vessel it is made in should be large.¹⁷

Such a colour scheme appears redolent of a similar desire to render the exterior of her daughter’s Cornish mansion, Lanhydrock House, in a yellow wash during the early nineteenth century.¹⁸

Mrs Hunt was an extremely dedicated mother, being appointed in the will of her husband as the sole guardian of their only surviving child, Anna Maria (1771–1861).¹⁹ On 2 November 1804 Anna Maria married the successful London barrister Charles Bagenal Agar (1769–1811), the youngest son of the Viscount Clifden ‘in the dwelling house of Mrs Mary Hunt in South Audley Street’.²⁰ The marriage settlement stated that ‘upon the death of her mother [Anna Maria] will become entitled by virtue of her said father’s will to have two dwelling houses situate in South Audley Street aforesaid of the yearly value of £300.’²¹ Some of Mrs Hunt’s probate papers imply that the second house mentioned here, and in the will of Thomas Hunt, was in fact No. 1 Dean Street (now No. 2 Deanery Street). This three-storeyed terrace ‘second rate’ house, built of darkened stock bricks with a dormered mansard roof (Fig. 5), was

situated immediately alongside No. 76. After looking at property on the south side of Upper Brook Street and a short residency at No. 19 Hereford Street in the parish of St Marylebone, Anna Maria returned to this house to be near her ailing mother.²² From 1807 she lived there, and in 1809 she successfully applied to the Phoenix Fire Office for a ‘proposed communication’ between the two houses.²³ Despite being resident in Dean Street her husband was not listed in the parish records or as a ratepayer until 1810, a year before his premature death.²⁴

In the last three months of her life Mrs Hunt was prescribed 384 draughts and medical treatments costing £56 5s 6d and endured regular applications of leeches.²⁵ She died on 19 April 1824. On 20 May 1824 a probate inventory was taken recording the ‘Household Furniture, Plate, Linen, China, Glass, Books, Wine and other Effects of the late Mrs Hunt’.²⁶ This gives an interesting insight into the layout and furnishing of an ordinary early nineteenth-century London town house. Despite some elements of Regency comfort, the rooms were practical rather than opulent. The complete contents of the house were ‘valued and appraised at the sum of £409 15s 6d’, including items of copperware, the contents of the wine cellar, china and glass, linen, plate, books and Mrs Hunt’s clothes.²⁷ Despite her previous financial difficulties, at the time of her death Mrs Hunt was a very wealthy lady with her estate being valued at £55,742 6s 7d. Such a transformation in her financial affairs would suggest that she was closely involved in her daughter’s business dealings particularly in respect to the expansion of Anna Maria’s large Cornish estate.

The household inventory clearly shows that each floor had three rooms, with the main frontage overlooking South Audley Street. At the very top of the house were three functional and tastefully furnished attic rooms, two at the front and one to the rear. These uncarpeted servants’ rooms were sparsely furnished, although two contain four-post bedsteads. The second floor also had three bedrooms;



Fig. 6. No. 76 South Audley Street, the crimson drawing room. The plaster ceiling is typical of Shepherd's work.
City of London, London Metropolitan Archives.



Fig. 7. No. 76 South Audley Street, the ante-room.
City of London, London Metropolitan Archives.



Fig. 8. No. 76 South Audley Street, the back drawing room.
City of London, London Metropolitan Archives.



Fig. 9. No. 76 South Audley Street, detail of staircase. *City of London, London Metropolitan Archives.*



Fig. 10. No. 76 South Audley Street, ground floor dining room. *City of London, London Metropolitan Archives.*

one with ‘a stained beech tent bedstead with painted cotton furniture’ and another with a mahogany ‘4 post bedstead with green morine furniture’. All of the bedrooms had Kidderminster carpets; many of the carpets in the house were underlain with Brussels carpet.

At the front on the first floor was the Crimson Drawing Room, (Fig. 6) with an ante-room alongside (Fig. 7). This main drawing room had a sophisticated domed ceiling but few items of furniture of a quality matching the surroundings. The back drawing room (Fig. 8) with its elegant stuccowork panels fared a little better, with crimson curtains, a Kidderminster carpet, a pier glass, twelve rush chairs, two glass candelabra, two small tables, a drawing in a frame and the only specified portrait in the house, of Soame Jenyns, MP.²⁸

The front door, which was positioned in Dean Street, led into the staircase hall (Fig. 9) and then through to a ground floor dining room (Fig. 10) and large library (Fig. 11) to the rear overlooking the garden. The library, with its heavy, coffered ceiling, bears some similarities to that of the former Portuguese Embassy at No. 74 South Audley Street (Fig. 12). Due to her poor health, the Library became Mrs Hunt’s makeshift bedroom with a ‘4 poster bedstead and furniture’ being recorded alongside simple green morine curtains, four painted rush seats, and a wainscot bureau. Few books are listed. The dining room was the most comprehensively furnished room in the house, with a six-ft.-long mahogany pillar and claw dining table, an expanding dining table, a mahogany sideboard, a painted deal pillar and claw table with green cover, twelve mahogany chairs,



Fig. 11. No. 76 South Audley Street, ground floor library. Heavy plasterwork typical of Edward Shepherd. *City of London, London Metropolitan Archives.*



Fig. 12. No. 74 South Audley Street, ceiling probably by Edward Shepherd. *National Monuments Register/ City of London, London Metropolitan Archives.*

a Pembroke table, brass wine cooler, pot cupboard, a six-leaved screen and a plate warmer. Despite no other evidence of entertaining, the wine cellar boasted a healthy ‘70 bottles of port, 98 of sherry, 151 of Madeira, 71 of Buccellas, 32 of Lisbon, 32 of Vidonia, 3 of rum’ along with 37 dozen empty bottles awaiting collection.

The service areas in the basement consisted of a housekeeper’s room, pantry and large kitchen. To the rear of the house, a garden of 47-ft. feet square looked beyond to Hyde Park, which an 1803 guidebook described as a ‘refreshing sward [where] people of fashion often go in their carriages ... and send their servants with jugs for its [spring] water’.²⁹ The communal stables were located in the adjoining Dean Street.

After her mother’s committal in the crypt of St Georges Field Burial Ground on Bayswater Road,

Anna Maria had to deal with the pressing task of the future of No 76 South Audley Street.³⁰ A lease agreement was drawn up in August 1824 with Lady Maria Cotes of ‘No. 37 Charles Street, Berkley Square’³¹, and in September 1824 she was occupying the house complete with all fixtures at a rent of £290 per annum with the house itself being insured for £3,000.³² Anna Maria continued to live in Dean Street until her death in 1861, when her son Thomas James Agar-Robartes took up residence. His only son Thomas Charles and his wife Mary Dickinson lived briefly at No. 76 South Audley Street before moving to Grosvenor Square and then Belgrave Square – so ended a continuous family tenancy of 150 years. The house then had several notable tenants until the early twentieth century, when it became offices. It was demolished in 1970.

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NOTES

- 1 Westminster Archive Centre (WAC), St George, Hanover Square Ratebooks, 1740; *Survey of London*, XL: The Grosvenor Estate in Mayfair, Part II (London, 1980), p. 290.
- 2 Howard Colvin, *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1600–1840* (New Haven and London, 2008), pp. 919–10.
- 3 *Idem*; Victor Belcher, 'Edward Shepherd c.1692–1741', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.
- 4 WAC, AC 72/14, lease issued on 15 January 1741; London Metropolitan Archives, ACC/1214, dated 1741.
- 5 Cornwall Record Office (CRO), CL 303, Draft Lease of No. 76 South Audley Street. To the south of No. 76 the premises were 'formerly demised to Joseph Lord Milton (since Earl of Dorchester).
- 6 A 1790 drawing by John Claude Nattes looking across to a partially obscured No. 79 Harley Street is at WAC./ T138(63). For a general history refer to Frank Kelsall, 'Cavendish Square', *Georgian Group Journal*, 1989, pp 75–9.
- 7 WAC, St Marylebone Ratebooks, 1725–50. Francis Shepherd paid rates until 1740 when Samuel Shepherd inherited the payments. Edward Shepherd's will (WAC, Acc 2047, dated 23 October 1747) mentions neither Francis nor Samuel Shepherd. The *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* mentions his sister Frances.
- 8 *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.
- 9 WAC, St George, Hanover Square Ratebooks, 1768–88.
- 10 Thomas Hunt was the great-great grandson of Henry Booth, while Mary Mrs Brydges of Canons (1668–1712) was the granddaughter of Sir John Langham, brother of Henry Booth's wife, Mary. A portrait of Mary Brydges in a Dunham Massey livery frame (attributed to Wissing in the 1845 Lanhydrock catalogue) hangs in the Long Gallery at Lanhydrock, Cornwall.
- 11 Their mother was Mary Vere Robartes (d.1758), great-granddaughter of John Robartes, first Earl Radnor (1606–85) of Lanhydrock, and heiress to Henry, third Earl of Radnor, who died without issue in 1741. She married Thomas Hunt of Mollington Hall (1684–1739) in 1719: CRO, CL 1307, Will of Thomas Hunt dated 4 June 1788. Thomas Hunt was buried 'near the remains of my Dear Child in the church of St Mary's in the City of Chester'. His eldest daughter Mary Vere died in 1780 aged 14.
- 12 WAC, St George, Hanover Square Ratebooks, 1795–1824. Sir Watkin Williams Wynn (d.1789) commissioned Robert Adam to build No. 20 St James Square in 1771–4, while Lady Charlotte Wynn commissioned John Soane to add to her house at Taplow, Buckinghamshire, in 1792.
- 13 Julie Schlarman, 'The Social Geography of Grosvenor Square: Mapping Gender and Politics, 1720–1760', *London Journal*, XXVIII(1) (2003), pp. 18, 25.
- 14 Rachel Stewart, 'The West End House c.1765–c.1785: Gamble and Forfeit', *Georgian Group Journal* XII (2002), pp. 135–46.
- 15 Lanhydrock House Archives (LHA). Payments made to 'Mortlock, Collector, 19, New Norfolk Street'.
- 16 For a potted history of Grosvenor Chapel, see Ann Chandler, (ed.) *Godly Mayfair* (Grosvenor Chapel, London, 1980); Sir John Betjemam in his introduction (p. iv) refers to the chapel as 'a little piece of New England in warm old London brick'. The Office of the Grand Junction waterworks was on the corner of South Molton Street.
- 17 LHA, LAN.EP.253. I am grateful to Robert Slack and Jenny Lizardos for this reference.
- 18 Paul Holden, 'The Hunt Family, Lanhydrock House and the Regency Style: Four Regency Inventories', *Furniture History*, XXXVII (2001), pp. 20–31.
- 19 CRO, CL 1307, Will of Thomas Hunt dated 4 June 1788.
- 20 CRO, CL 303, 416. Mary Hunt and Elizabeth Lewis were witnesses to the marriage although Mrs Hunt was considered 'to ill' to execute the marriage settlement.

- 21 Royal Institution of Cornwall, Courtney Library, Truro, HJ/1977/44.
- 22 CRO, CL 416. Their subsequent home was at No. 11 Great Cumberland Street. In 1808 they moved out of town to Kingston-on-Thames.
- 23 LHA, letter to Mrs Hunt from Phoenix Fire Office, Charing Cross, 13 November 1809.
- 24 CRO CL 416; WAC, M/F 472, C509; WCA microfiche 472, C 509 (Poor watch and paving). The rates for the years preceding 1810 were paid by Lady Mary Affleck. In the will of Charles Agar both Anna Maria and Mary Hunt were named as guardians to his children Thomas James (1808–82) and the then unborn Edward.
- 25 LHA. Full records of her final months are recorded in a collection of invoices and receipts collated by her daughter.
- 26 The inventory was taken by H. Mathews, 16 Bridge Row, Walbrook and Jonathan Jones, 29 Duke Street, Grosvenor Square.
- 27 Appraisal was dated 19 May 1824 the day before the inventory date. The invoice of £12 was presented by Jonathan Jones on 28 May 1824.
- 28 Now housed at Lanhydrock House, Cornwall.
- 29 CRO, CL303; *The Picture of London for 1803* (London, 1803), pp. 63–4.
- 30 LHA, LAN.MS.2128.
- 31 CRO, CL303.
- 32 CRO CL303; LHA, ‘The Honble Anna Maria Agar to N.D. Kent. Bill from 1st Jan.y 1825 to 22 July following’. No. 1 Dean Street was insured by the Royal Exchange Insurance Office for £2,000, with the furniture and books valued at £850 and the glass at £250.