

## JOHN NASH AND LONDON

We now come to a remarkable account of a man, a plan, and a city. The man is John Nash, the plan is Regent Street, and the city is London. As in the story of Bath, we are dealing with an architect-developer-promoter. But here the man started out as an architect, and the developer-promoter was the product of his desire to bring to fruition his vast architectural visions. In strong contrast to Bath with its open countryside, the heart of a completely developed section of London was the area in which Nash chose to realize his ideas.

The design structure of what he produced is demonstrated on the opposite page. Shown in green are the tree masses in the two great parks he planned: Regent's Park at the top and St. James's Park below. The yellow line represents the route of Regent Street, which connected the two parks, and in black are shown those locations which are now occupied, or were originally occupied, by structures of Nash's design or by those designed in close association with him and in accordance with the architectural requirements of his layout. In gray are shown important buildings relating to Nash's work.

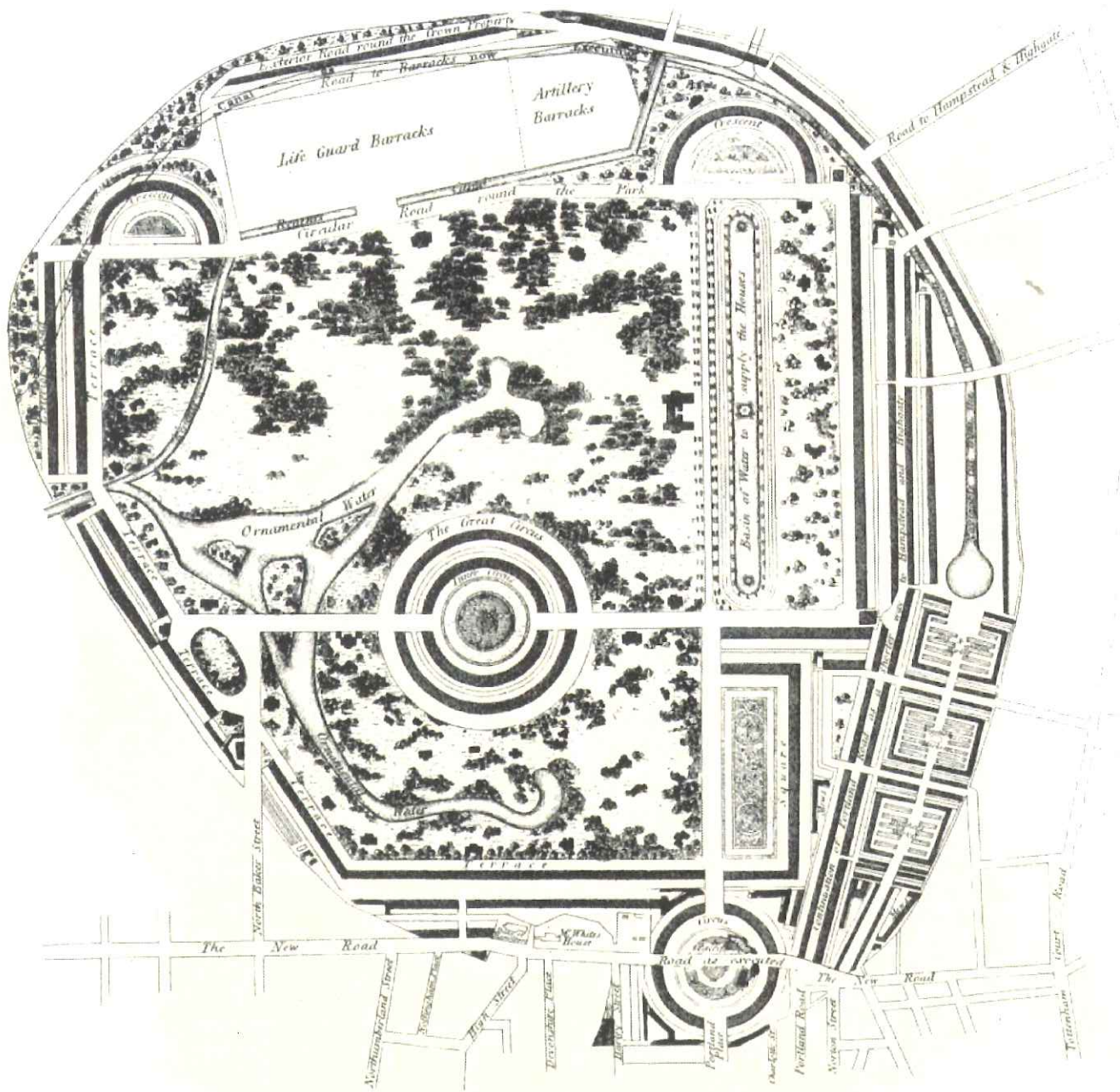
Here is an example of the work of one man of inexhaustible energy, in which the vast design structure and the detailed buildings are inseparable, in which the buildings themselves carry for-

ward the underlying design concept and make it work.

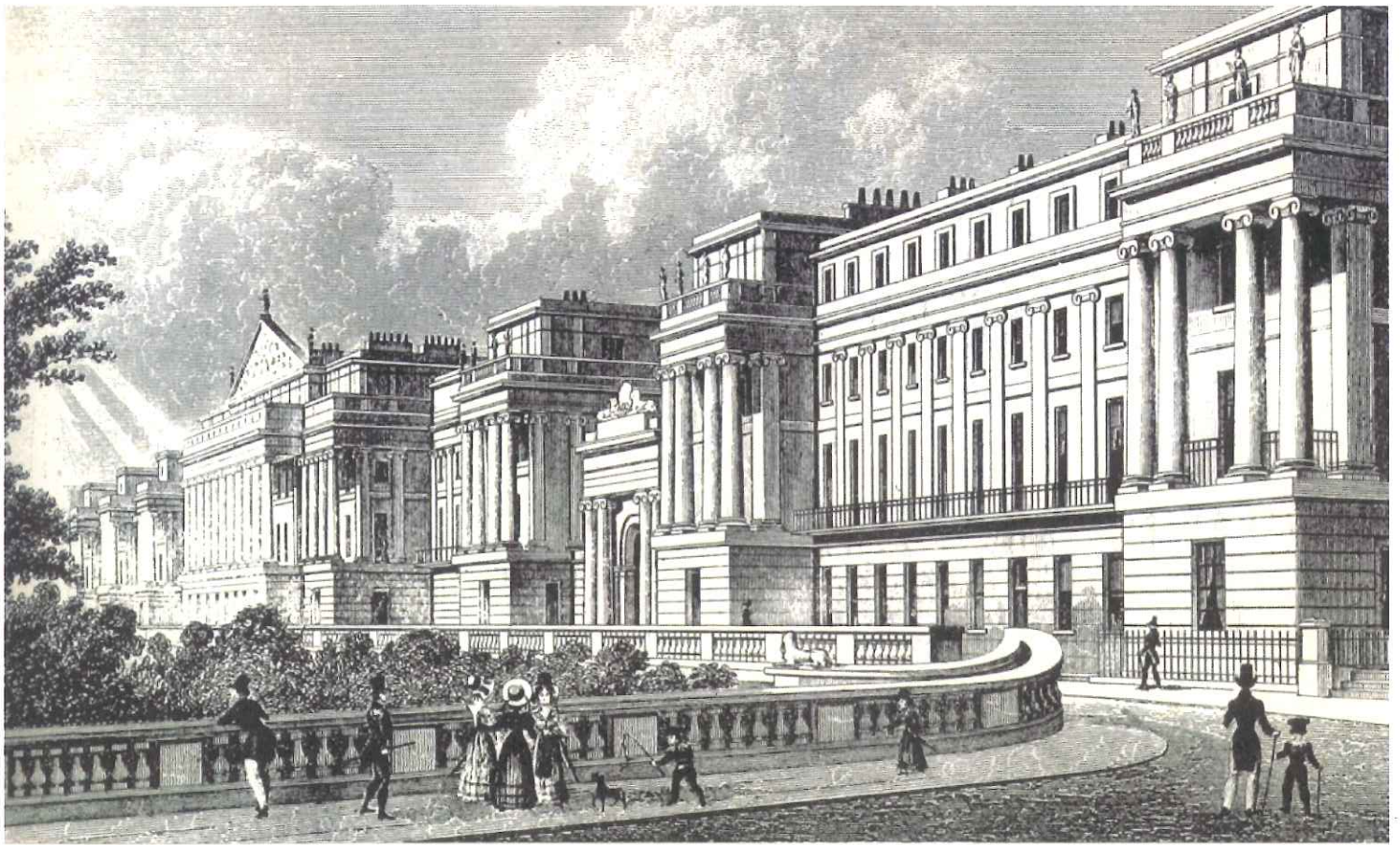
Around Regent's Park, like two hands clasping a precious substance, is the two-mile-long extent of terrace houses which give architectural definition to the park. The park, in turn, provides a fine setting for the terraces. Park Square and the semicircle of Park Crescent, shown in the recent painting above, serve as a powerful connector with the older Portland Place lined with Adam architecture.

The offset required by Foley House is made architecturally brilliant by the round portico of All Souls Church at the south end of Portland Place. The wide offset necessary to meet the axis of what was formerly Carlton House, now Carlton House Terrace, was accomplished by the great arc of the quadrant, which Nash had to finance himself in order to get it built. Finally, the sequence of movement was extended along the Mall (which lies to the north of St. James's Park) to Buckingham Palace, for which Nash made the original design. The Nash plan provisioned Trafalgar Square (in a form somewhat different from that built) and proposed a new street extending to the British Museum. If this street had been made, it would have further strengthened the organization of Central London.









## EVERY MAN A KING

The first half of the nineteenth century (when Cumberland Terrace, shown above, was built) was a period of social upheaval in which rapidly expanding commercial and manufacturing enterprises had produced a great enlargement of the moneyed middle class. This led to a large-scale demand for residences, ample but not palatial in extent, which looked as much like palaces as possible. Nash's ideas fitted perfectly into this demand, and his architecture plus his organizing skill, applied in his vast concept of a new environment, produced the palace-like structure shown here in an engraving from a drawing by Thomas H. Shepherd.

Cumberland Terrace is a great sequence of theatrical effect, with projecting columnar bays, sculptured pediments, and triumphal arches leading to service yards. Yet it was so dear to the hearts of Londoners that, after the ravages of World War II, the deteriorated and partially damaged structures of this and the other Nash terraces around Regent's Park, property of the Crown, were re-

built at great cost to look much as they did before.

Nash interwove his great terraces with the un-built spaces in a fresh and startling way. Shown opposite is his early design for the development of Regent's Park. This may be compared with the actual development, seen on the previous pages. The original idea connected the park to the city via Portland Place, with a complete circle of buildings, a "circus," marking the junction with the New Road, or east-west artery, originally designed to set the northern limit of London. The circular form was recalled in the two half-circle crescents to the north, and in the great double ring of terrace houses — the Inner Circus and the Great Circus — designed to give architectural form to the park. This plan stands as a milestone in the effort to produce an environment built on the economics of small-house ownership, while allowing at the same time the joys of relationship with nature previously associated with the country houses of the aristocracy.

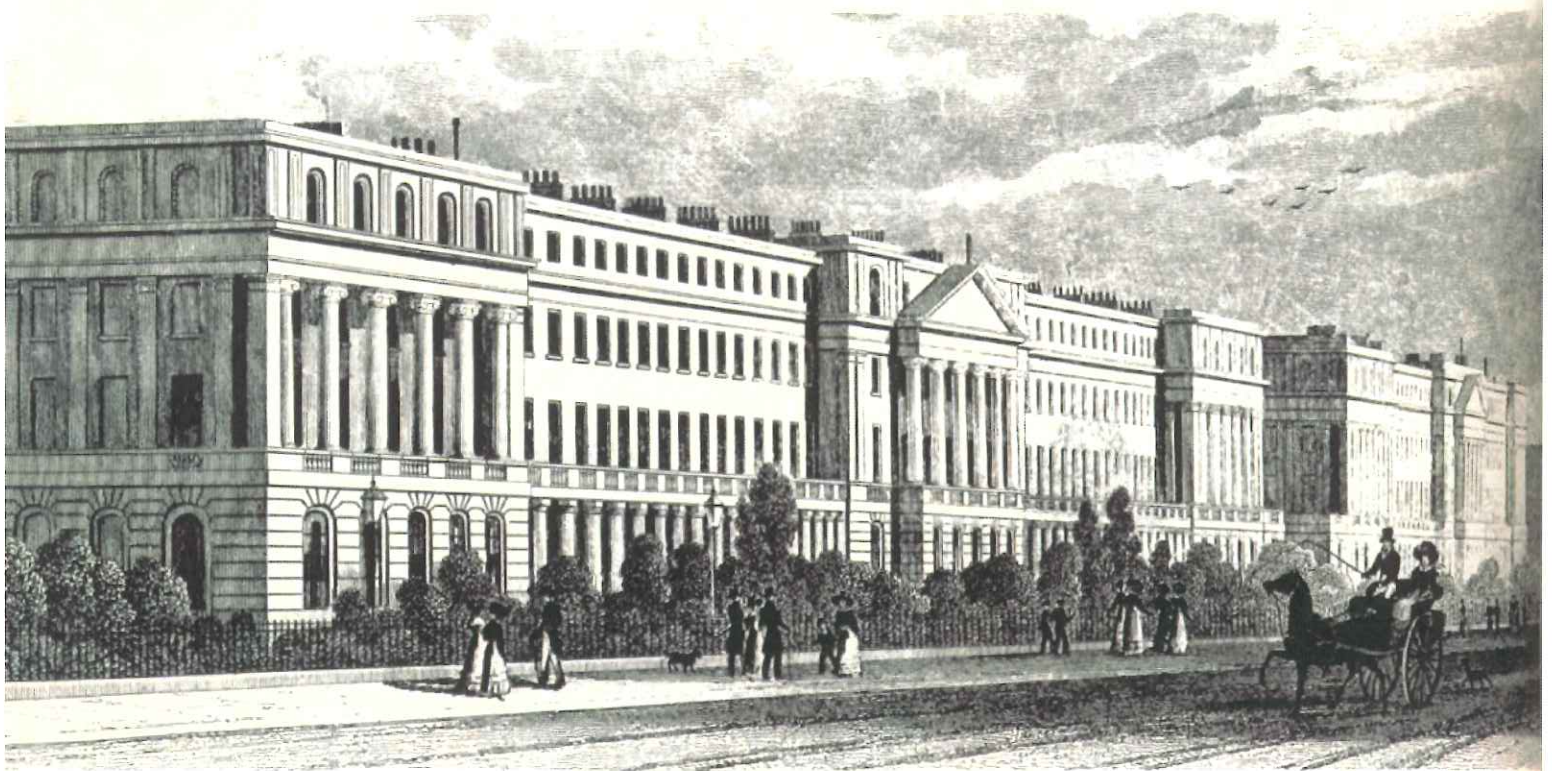


## DESIGNS AFFECTING EACH OTHER

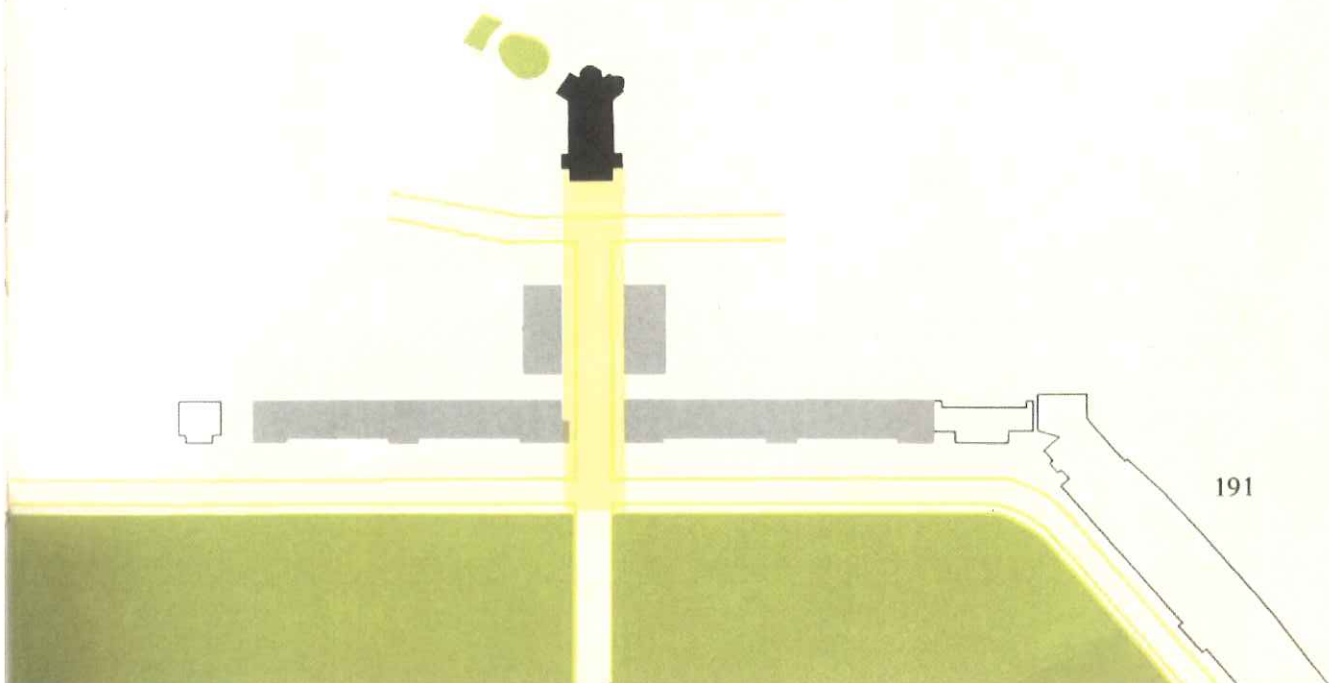
A comparison of the intentions of Nash, as indicated in his plan of 1812 on page 188, with the actual execution on the ground shows an interesting change that occurred because of the construction of Saint Marylebone Church south of New Road at a point below the Great Circus. Originally Nash had planned to "turn his back" on the rest of the city by creating an unbroken row of houses extending west from the Circus at Portland Place to the juncture with North Baker Street, almost at the edge of the park. The decision in 1816 to build the new parish Church of Saint Marylebone enriched the design of the park and its setting because it prompted Nash to provide an interruption in York Terrace (shown below) and make another point of penetration into the old city, reinforcing that established at Portland Place.

The engraving to the right shows Saint Marylebone Church encased in the prism of space defined by the two ends of the buildings that make

up York Terrace. Here, as at Greenwich, is an example of the interlock between two structures obtained by two masses at the opposite sides of the connecting plane. The church was begun in 1813 simply as a "Chapel-of-ease," but, as is shown in the drawing at right, it was extended, during construction, from its original narrow width by two projecting bays with two Corinthian columns, which have no function except to provide the volume necessary to receive the full thrust of the shaft of space defined by the ends of York Terrace. This alteration arose from a decision to designate the new chapel "the parish church of Saint Marylebone," but how much that decision was, in turn, influenced by Nash's offer of fine siting possibilities we can only guess. We do know, however, that the interaction of the series of forces at play produced a potent harmony between the work of two architects for two different clients, making a very important extension of a design structure.









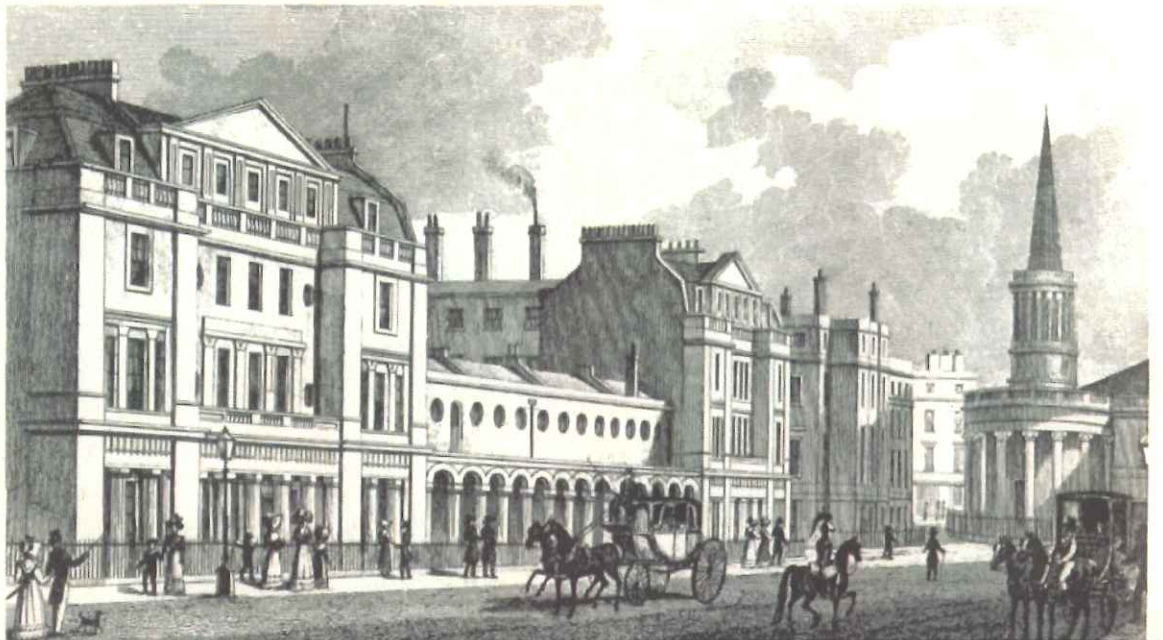


## TURNING A CORNER

The early plan for Regent Street, shown on page 194, shows a continuous, smooth flowing curve from the end of Portland Place to a point north of the Oxford Street crossing. Later, Nash moved the position of Regent Street eastward at this location to avoid the disruption of the backs of the large houses on Cavendish Square. The offset as built was made by a much sharper bend because of a real-estate deal that Nash made with Sir James Langham, the purchaser of a portion of the Foley estate at the foot of Portland Place. This potentially awkward kink in the direction of Regent Street would have proved a disaster, had not Nash convinced the authorities to build All Souls Church on its present site and to designate him as its architect. It is a building which, by the adroit placing of its circular spired vestibule, does an astonishing job of turning chaos into order.

The engraving above shows a vista toward

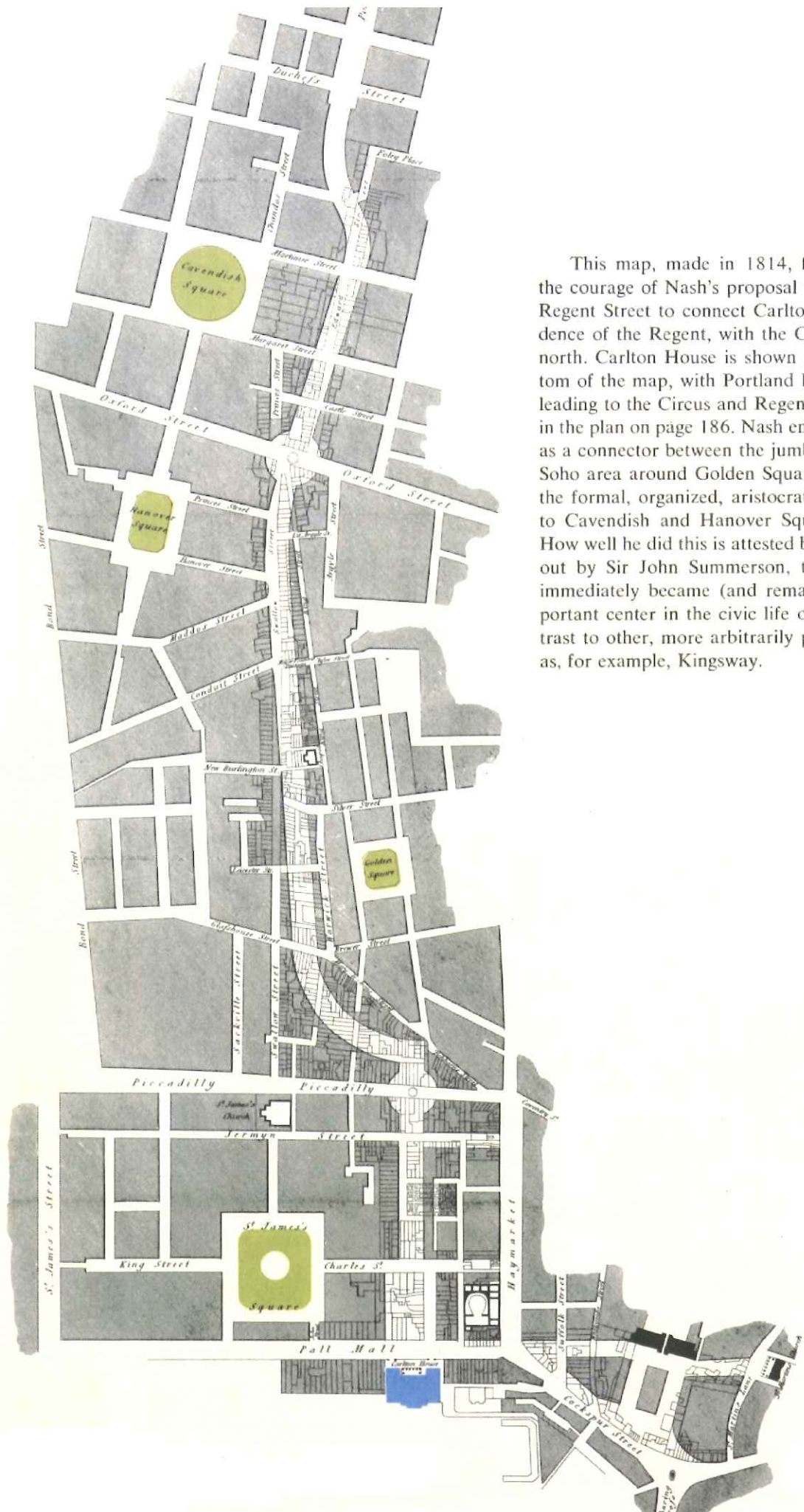
All Souls Church (on the extreme left), the terminal feature, from a point just below the change in direction of Regent Street south of the Oxford Street crossing. The dome here is the one shown on page 195. Below is a closer view from the north, showing the positioning of the circular colonnaded vestibule in the complex space of the elbow bend, and the successful transition which this design affords. The picture on the right shows that the building, in addition to fulfilling its functions in relation to the design structure, is vigorous and energetic in its own right. Here is architecture fine in itself, yet architecture that is made to do its work in the larger scheme of things so well that it still conducts the movement around the difficult turn in Regent Street with power and grace, uncrushed by the intrusion of the ugly mass of the British Broadcasting Corporation Building, which has now been built beside it.





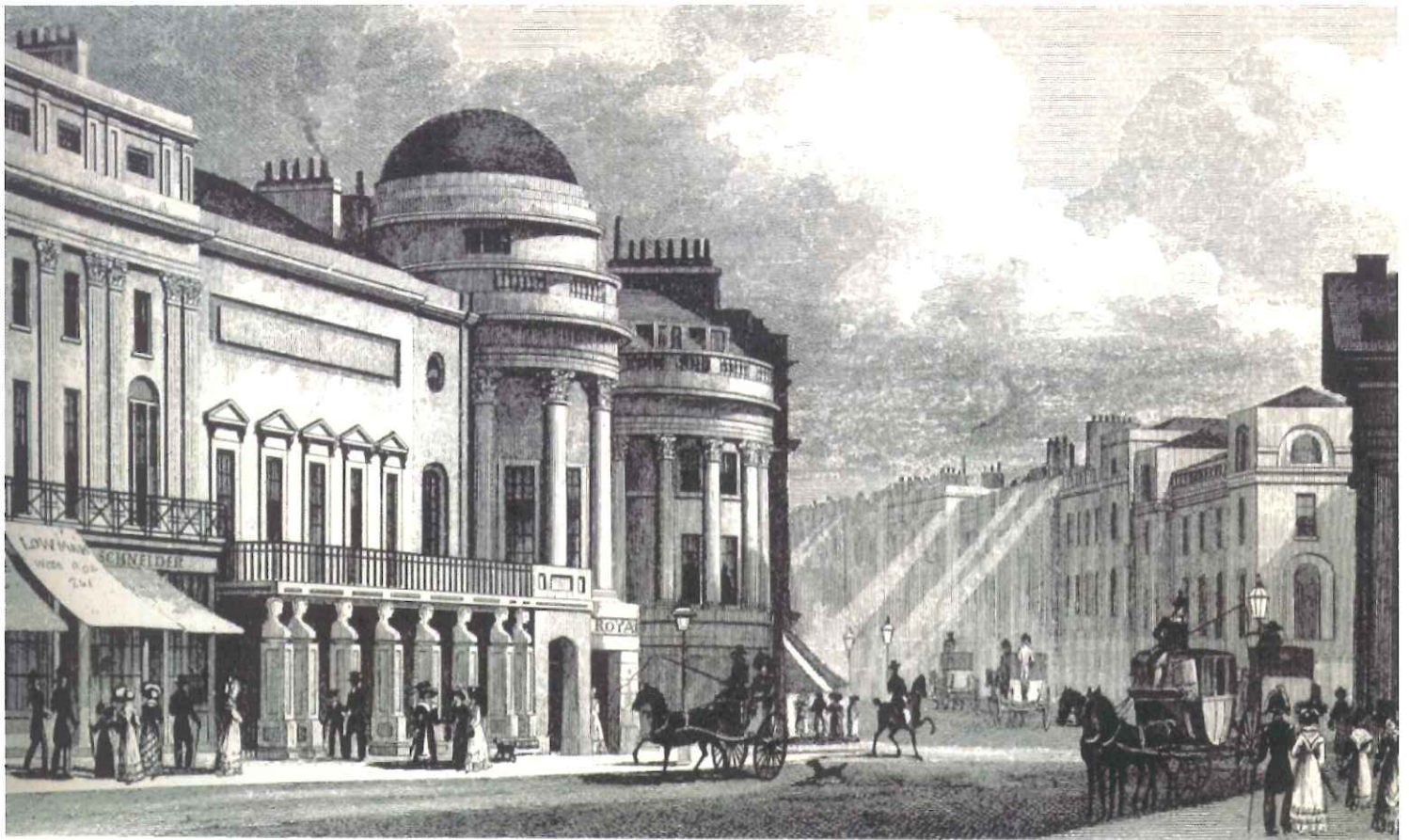






This map, made in 1814, forcefully portrays the courage of Nash's proposal for the location of Regent Street to connect Carlton House, the residence of the Regent, with the Crown lands to the north. Carlton House is shown in blue at the bottom of the map, with Portland Place at the north, leading to the Circus and Regent's Park, as shown in the plan on page 186. Nash envisioned the street as a connector between the jumbled pattern of the Soho area around Golden Square to the east, and the formal, organized, aristocratic section relating to Cavendish and Hanover Squares to the west. How well he did this is attested by the fact, pointed out by Sir John Summerson, that Regent Street immediately became (and remains today) an important center in the civic life of London, in contrast to other, more arbitrarily placed streets such as, for example, Kingsway.





## SINUOSITY OF REGENT STREET

Nash adapted the form of Regent Street to meet the functional requirements of the city, rather than imposing a preconceived architectural form on the fabric of the city. Where he met an obstacle he moved around it. Where necessary, he invented architectural forms to meet the requirements of his design structure.

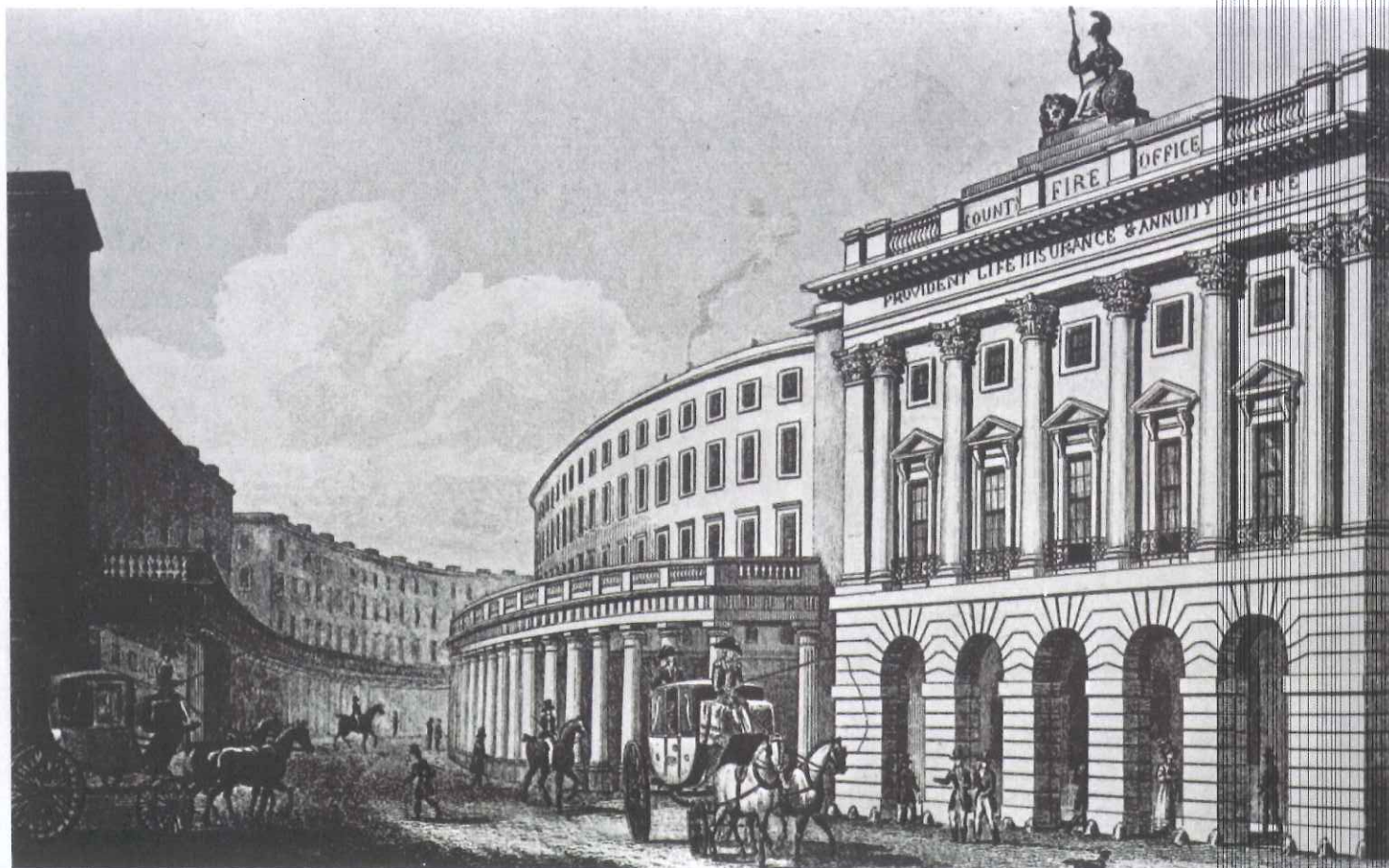
The portion of Regent Street at the crossing of Oxford Street was determined by the depth requirements of the houses on the blocks butting onto Cavendish and Hanover Squares. The circular non-directional form of the intersection with Oxford Street was conceived by Nash to avert the "fashionable objection" to residences north of that point. The superb handling of the changes in direction of the street by the cylindrical pavilions and flat domes of the bordering buildings under Nash's design, as well as the rich changes of rhythm and scale, is shown in the engraving above. The view is looking south at a point just south of the Oxford Street crossing.

Since one of the objectives of the street, in the first instance, was to connect the new park and its

adjacent development with Carlton House (the residence of the Prince Regent), the architectural requirements of this building became a major consideration in the design. Nash extended the open space before Carlton House three blocks to the north and across Piccadilly to a terminal point now occupied by the County Fire Office. To take care of the offset between this axis and the line of Regent Street to the north, Nash originally planned a square with straight streets moving out of the opposite corners. This, however, proved to be too expensive, so the brilliant expedient of the arc-shaped street or Quadrant was conceived, designed, and even largely built by Nash.

By a curious irony, Carlton House, itself the inspirer of much of the design, was torn down shortly after the Regent became King, but Nash was able to turn the expediency to account in his design of the Carlton House Terraces, the Duke of York Column, and the great flight of steps that so splendidly connects the volume of his spaces in Regent Street via the Mall leading to Buckingham Palace.





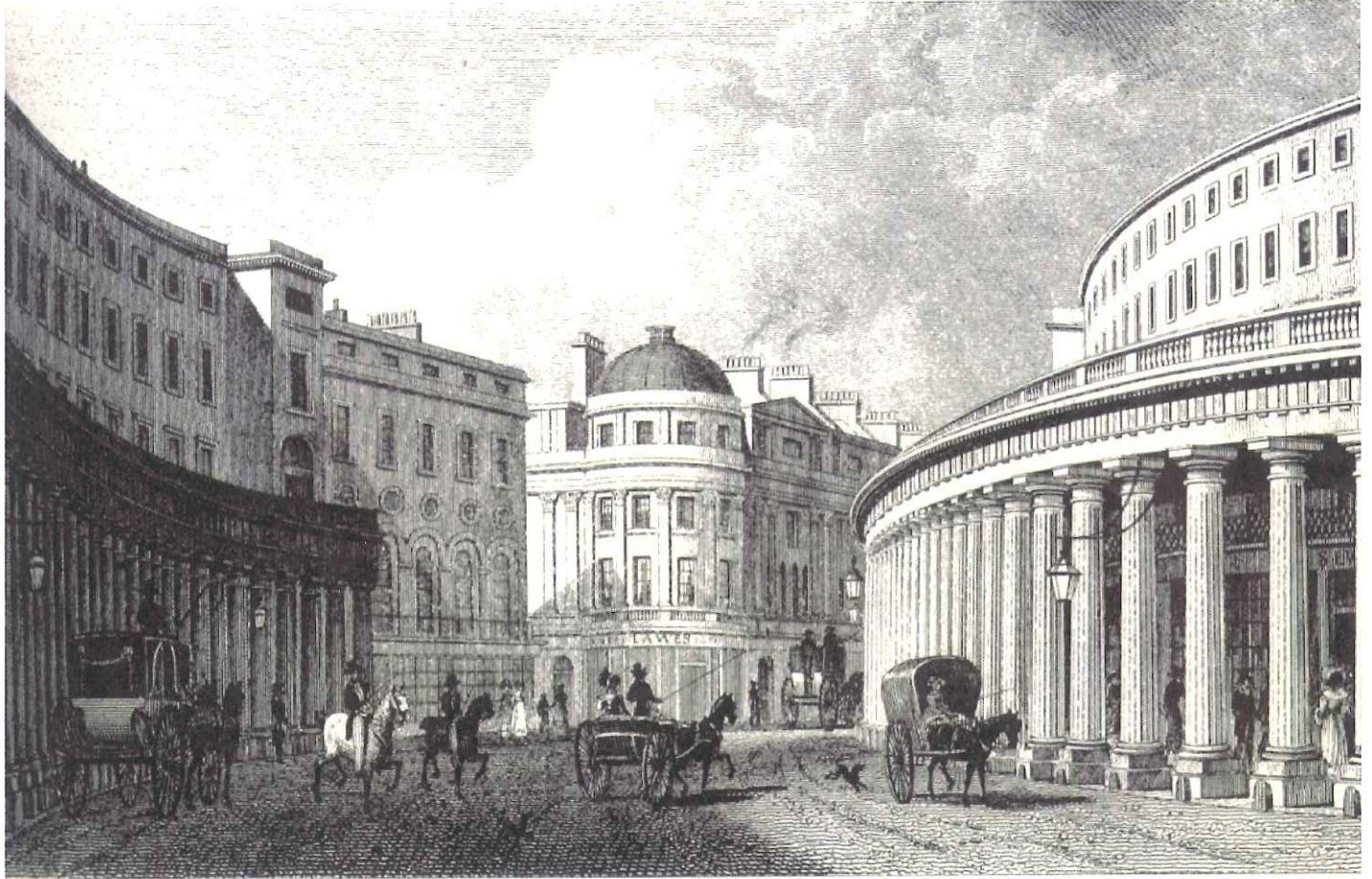
## THE GREAT QUADRANT

The great Quadrant is the consummate expression of the interaction of the design structure and architecture which Nash devised for taking care of the offset of Regent Street at this point. Although it is a satisfactory solution for the traffic flow, it certainly is not a design that would be produced if traffic were the only consideration. The County Fire Office (the terminal building at the right of the engraving above) is the same building as the one shown on page 199 (in the center), terminating the extension of space from Carlton House. It serves to turn the corner architecturally and to deflect the movement into the Quadrant.

Not until his fifty-eighth year did Nash change from being a country-house architect to assume

the multiple functions of city planner-designer-builder-promoter. This change, following his marriage, was due to his close association with the Prince Regent, later to become George IV. The association provided Nash with large resources and substantial influence, which he used with telling effect. In 1809 Nash was appointed architect to the Office of Woods and Forests. In this capacity he was asked to prepare proposals for the development of the Crown lands of Saint Mary-le-bone and their connection with Westminster. These led to the plan for Regent's Park and Regent Street. This sudden contact with the larger problem seemed to unlock great reserves of strength in Nash. It produced in him a drive of such propor-





tions that he was left unsatisfied simply with the creation of the government plan, and was led to invest his own money in the construction of those parts of the plan nobody else was willing to build.

The design and the idea behind Regent Street were such that most of its length could be divided into normal-sized building lots for separately financed units. There soon arose a number of projects for developments along the street. Many of these were designed by Nash, and others were by architects closely allied with him, so that considerable architectural coherence was attained along the route. But there was one section, the arc of the Great Quadrant, which could not be developed

piecemeal, either architecturally or financially, yet the investors were reluctant to speculate the large sums necessary to build it as a unit in the early stages of the project. Undaunted, Nash stepped into the breach and realized this portion of his plan through the investment of his own funds.

All the buildings which Nash designed on Regent Street have been cleared away, and his smooth-faced façades have been replaced by the massive rusticated architecture of a later age. But the volume contained between them remains intact, and the spirit of the plan, the thrust of the movement, survives, proving that the skillful design of space can be more important than the design of buildings.



## WATERLOO PLACE

The map opposite shows in yellow the space form imposed by Nash on the older mass of the building blocks (shown in gray) extending north from Carlton House, shown here in blue. In black are shown the principal buildings designed directly by John Nash in order to carry out the spatial design objectives. Above Piccadilly is the County Fire Office, connecting with the Great Quadrant, just described. To the right, across Haymarket, is the Haymarket Theatre, which provides a terminal for the vista from St. James's Square along Charles Street, which Nash extended to this point. This theater was originally in a slightly different location, but Nash persuaded the owner to move it to fit the plan, and also to engage him as the architect. The result is shown in the 1829 engraving below. The very satisfactory effect still persists, despite the replacement of all the buildings except the theater itself.

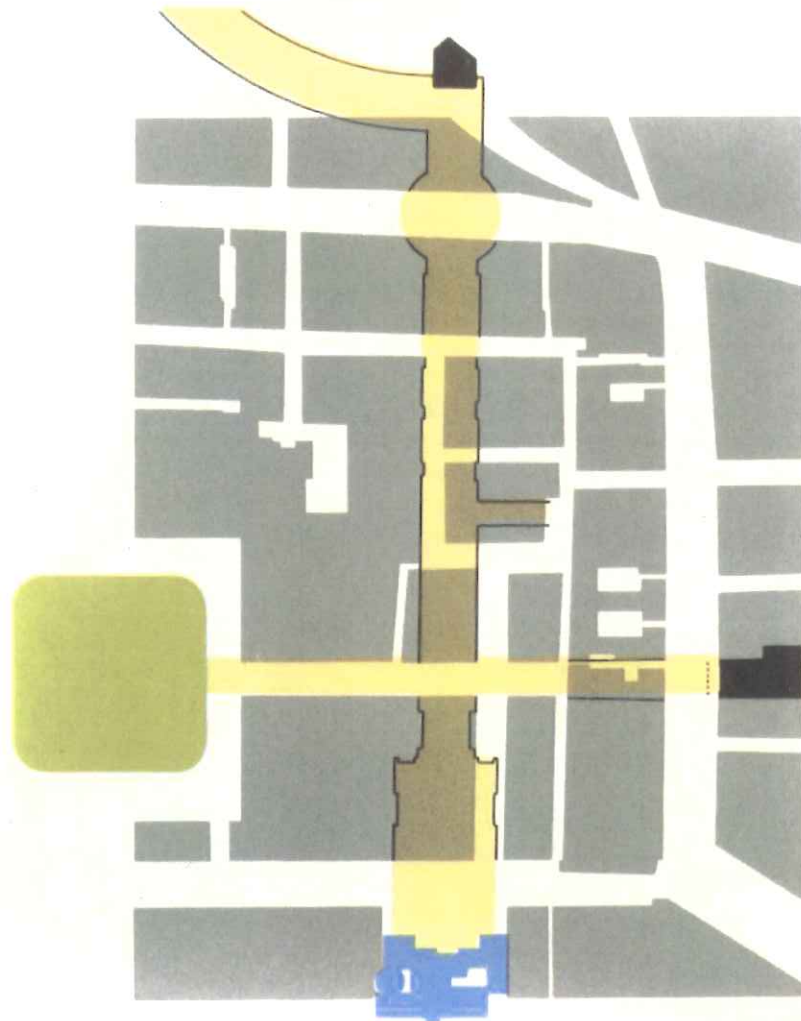
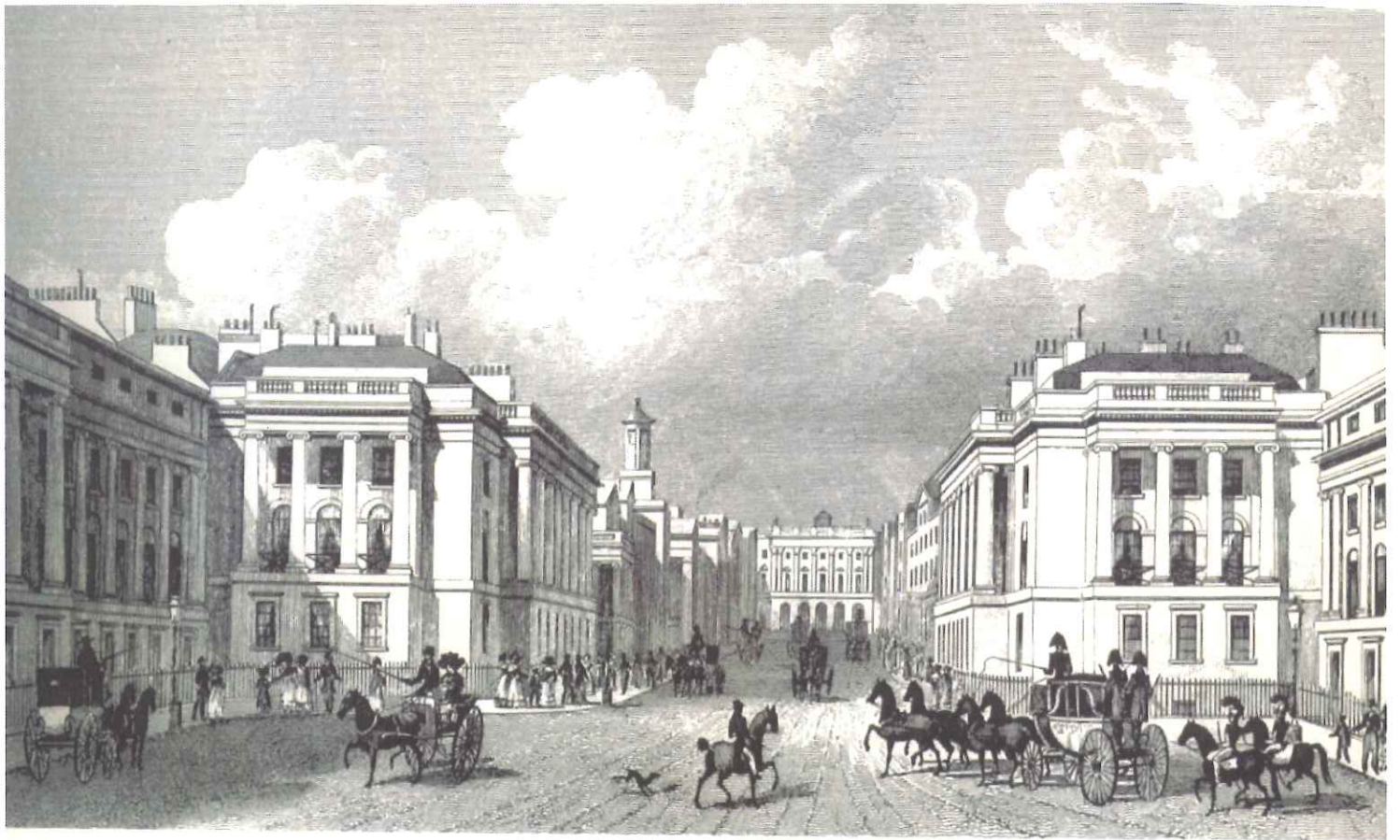
The engraving opposite, of the vista north from Carlton House, shows the flanking buildings, with the projecting four Ionic column bays, and the nearer buildings (also with Ionic columns in their central bays) successfully articulating Nash's space form and providing a proscenium kind of counter-

foil for the deeply recessed façade of his County Fire Office. The four identically balanced buildings originally were all part of a single development. Although these buildings have been torn down long since, and replaced by buildings for separate, unrelated enterprises, the spirit of the interconnection of the building to the space has been retained, even within widely divergent building programs.

When the Prince Regent became King, he decided to move his residence from Carlton House to Buckingham Palace. Nash proposed that terraces of houses be built in the grounds of the old house, which was to be torn down and replaced by the York Column and a great flight of steps. The proposal was accepted, and thus Nash obtained income for the Crown from the old property and achieved a wonderful extension of his movement system. This ran from Regent Street and Waterloo Place, down to the Mall adjacent to St. James's Park (redesigned by him), and along the Mall to the terminal feature, Buckingham Palace. So it is that today one can travel in London from Buckingham Palace to Cumberland Terrace all along a way largely conceived, in both mass and space, by John Nash.





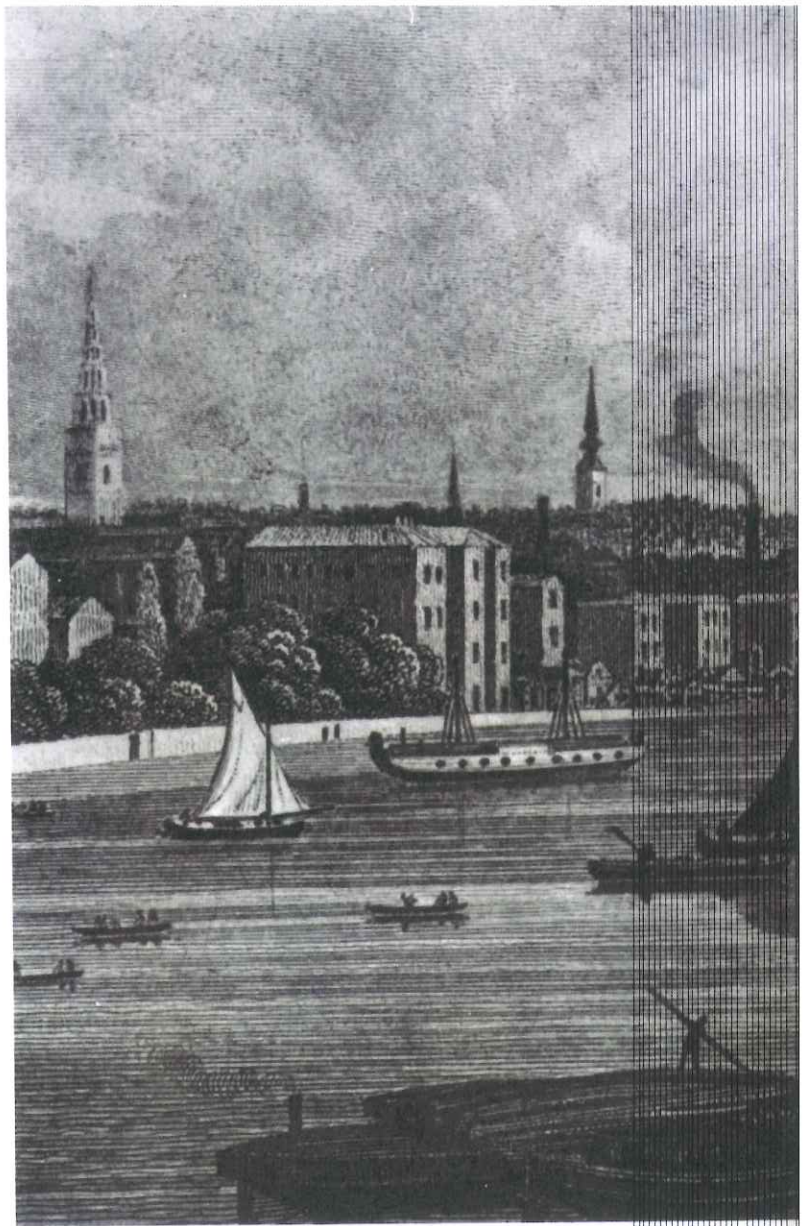


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## LONDON AND THE UPPER AIR

All the work we have observed, the extension of the delicate threads of the design structure which Nash imposed over a significant part of London, along with the fine things I have not mentioned, such as the interlocking and interconnecting squares laid out by the landlords when their estates were divided into building plots on long lease, produced a city which by the middle of the nineteenth century was rich in living values and beautiful in a way that was unique among the capitals of Europe. But the beauty of this web of interrelated spaces was fragile indeed, and far more vulnerable to the destructive effects of progress than were the somewhat cruder yet more vigorous designs of other leading cities, such as Paris and Rome. These cities have taken strong measures to preserve the beauties of their most historic parts. Thus, as one stands on the Pont des Arts in Paris, one can see a skyline from the Louvre on the north side of the



river to the Institut de France on the south side, with Notre Dame in the background, which is virtually unchanged since the eighteenth century. And so with Rome, except for the massive intrusion of the Victor Emmanuel Monument, the skyline is still that of the great period, and indeed there is a concerted plan to create new centers to deflect the thrust of new development elsewhere than in the historical heart of the city.

In London it is different. The beautiful engraving above shows the purity of the city skyline in the nineteenth century, the silhouette of Saint Paul's firmly in dominance, the delicate patterns of the parish church spires giving rhythm and depth to the space just above the rooftops. Of course all this has to change; the city has to adapt itself to the twentieth century. But how?

It is an ironical fact, brutally apparent in reality, that when the energies of our own time inevi-





tably extended the London skyline upward, above the beautifully structured nineteenth-century city, they did so without system. Towering buildings were sprinkled in any expedient location without respect to the design structure that had been laboriously built up over hundreds of years.

This is not to say that changes should not be made; it is to decry the way in which they are made. The problem is rooted in a basic attitude toward individual rights as against the public good, and the difficulty of finding legal and administrative procedures for holding the balance between them. Currently, in England, the idea prevails that the developer of an individual site need only "prove" that the expansion of his accidental plot three hundred feet into the air is not against the public good. This is a process which of itself creates disorder, for the unrelated desires of property-owners will be chaotic and the public interest can be served

truly only if it is first defined in terms of a three-dimensional plan to which all individual claims are referred.

London can and should have tall buildings, and they can be built without destroying the old design plan; indeed, they can enhance it, as Stockholm has proved with its five Norrmalm Towers. If the intensification of development were related to the functional patterns of transportation, the new towers would be served by new means of access, and the new channels of movement would become the plumbline for the new skyscape, giving a functional base for order in the sky.

Can transportation arteries, above, below, or on the ground, be injected into the old organism, and can a new design structure related to the old grow out of these? Where is there a more strikingly affirmative answer than in the work of John Nash?