

modern buildings have a back and front, but country houses generally have two 'fronts', because they are entered from one side but they address themselves to the landscape park on the other. Nash's building does this very successfully. The garden at the back of the Pall Mall clubs is a slightly strange space, but it's very quiet and does have a special character, it is not entirely symmetrical – you don't enter clubs from this side, you enter them from Pall Mall.

Then there is a very strange thing, the block between St James's Square and Pall Mall is actually very thin – thinner than the depth of the block containing the clubs. This is because when St James's Square was developed in the 1660s, Pall Mall was already established as a primary street so the buildings on the south side of St James's Square originally presented their fronts to Pall Mall and their backs to St James's Square. Now some of them are back to back – in peculiar contrast to the social and architectural ambitions of the Square. St James's Square has its general symmetry, and then to the north you get the service condition. Apple Tree Yard, which is a mews between St James's Square and Jermyn Street, which again is symmetrical. So there is a symmetry of section through the block, from the primary activity of the square through the mews and up again to the scale of Jermyn Street.

Then we come to Norman Shaw's Piccadilly Hotel. In plan it is the meeting point between Piccadilly and Regent Street which forms a wedge-shaped block. So the hotel is constrained absolutely by an urban proposition which is to do with its palace-like relationship to Piccadilly and the crescent of Regent Street to the north. The hotel presents itself as such on its entrance side to Piccadilly but is entirely subsumed by the uses and rhetoric of Regent Street.

Then you cut through Regent Street to the back of Glasshouse Street, and you get the sense that even cities of the commercial power of London cannot sustain commercial activity in very long sections. There has to be quiet, and Glasshouse Street is very quiet, not a transactional street. It is a relatively low rental office street which collides with the old bit of Soho and then this part becomes dissonant.

Symmetries across places are perhaps generally a good thing, but my proposition does not depend upon symmetry occurring all the time. Off Regent Street, everything is dissonant and strange and interesting. Golden Square is full of amazing one-offs, talking very fast at each other, in a manner very uncharacteristic of the eighteenth-century urban ideal. Generally the surveyors, for example on the Bedford Estate in the eighteenth century, were sure that the long term value of the estates depended upon the style of the estate being maintained and upon leases that constrained people so that things like this couldn't happen, which is, in retrospect, interesting to our own situation.

One last point: for 10 years or so I've had reprints from Booth's London Poverty maps of 1889 on my wall. I suddenly realised that Booth's demographic record of wealth is always symmetrical across streets and shows change occurring across the block.

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