

St Marylebone and The Portman Estate

Today, only a small part of the Portman Estate is embraced by the present-day parish of St Marylebone but for centuries, its central London estates made up nearly half of the parish's area. These pages tell something of the story of Marylebone's Portman Estate. More information can be found at <http://www.portmanestate.co.uk/timeline.aspx> the Portman Estate's Timeline, compiled by Richard Bowden, the estate's archivist, from which much of this information is taken.

Today, The Portman Estate has adopted a dynamic and active management strategy. When the title passed to Christopher, 10th Viscount Portman, in 1999, new trustees were appointed, the new post of Chief Executive was created and there was a restructuring of the staff, all of which has led to a much more imaginative development of the Estate. See The Baker Street Quarter initiative <http://www.bakerstreetquarter.co.uk/>

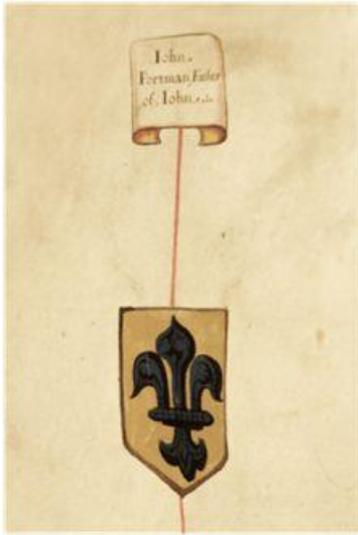


In spite of successive governments, rent acts, estate duty and capital transfer tax, leasehold enfranchisement and town and country planning acts, the geography of central London west of the City is still recognisably the same as it has been for a number of centuries.

The great London estates have survived because they have learned to manage their London property in a commercial and proactive way, always looking to the future. This ability to achieve the right balance between short term returns and long term growth has also allowed the estates to focus on their stewardship role – to deliver more to their communities, to public realm and to the environment. This has been especially important in a recession. With the absence of public money, it has been the estates who have continued to invest in their neighbourhoods; for the good of London as a whole. The Portman Estate aims to maintain this investment for the foreseeable future.



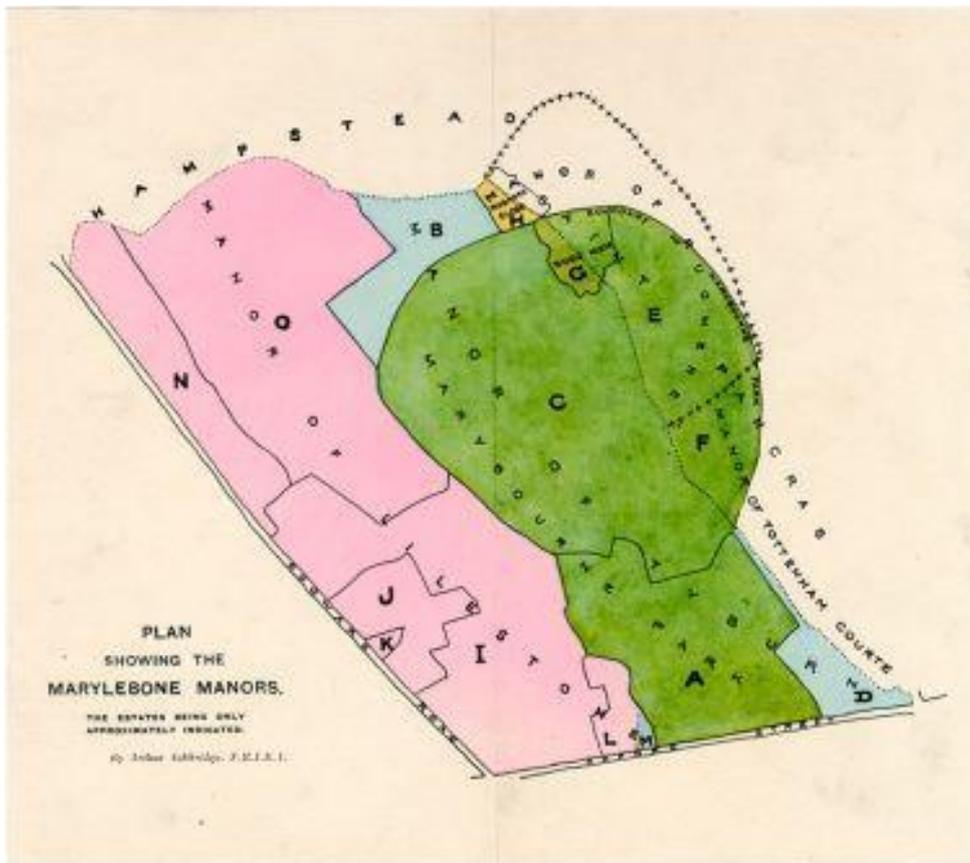
Christopher, 10th Viscount Portman, opening the newly refurbished Old Church Memorial Garden in November 2012 with representatives of The Marylebone society, Westminster City Council and Hinde Street Methodist Church.



By 1300 the Portman Coat of Arms is already established, but it is in the mid-16th century that the family's association with Marylebone begins.

The Parish of St Marylebone originally comprised the two manors of Lilestone and Tyburn, the areas coloured Pink and Green, in addition to some other smaller parcels of land.

Image credits: Westminster City Archives



Sir William Portman (c1498-1557)



Sir William Portman joined the Middle Temple in 1517. In 1532 he was elected a Reader there – an important step – and the following year he was granted a wardship by Henry VIII – another distinction. He went on to become a serjeant-at-law in 1540 and in 1546 a judge of the King's Bench. In 1547 he was knighted by Edward VI and in 1554 under Queen Mary he reached the top of his profession, becoming Lord Chief Justice of England. Three years later he died and after a magnificent funeral he was buried in the church of St Dunstan's-in-the-West, Fleet Street.

He had negotiated with remarkable success the political upheavals of the Reformation and the years of religious turmoil that followed and he was said to have displayed 'a degree of integrity and independence very unusual among the judges in those despotic times'.

In 1544 Sir William acquired a number of manors that had previously belonged to four religious houses in Somerset, making the Portman family for the first time major West Country landowners. However, this followed what would turn out to be his most important purchase – the *11 fields in Marylebone*. Sir William is said to have acquired these fields as a means of supplying his wife with fresh milk. Almost 500 years later they remain the basis of the Portman Estate of today.

In 1555, Sir William Portman became Lord Chief Justice of England.

For two hundred years the 11 fields in Marylebone remained farmland. However, in 1755 Henry William Berkeley Portman began to develop the London Estate, granting a lease to William Baker which enabled him to issue the first building leases. William Baker - Baker Street is named after him - began building in Orchard Street and Portman Street, which were named after the family's original home in Somerset. The map of 1769 shows how quickly the new Estate grew.

The New Road opened in 1756. Renamed Marylebone Road 100 years later, it was designed as a bypass to Oxford Street for cattle on their way to Smithfield Market and to enable the army to move swiftly to defend London from an invader – hence its width. (Oxford Street was crowded even in the 1750s). It is likely that the move to build it was a major reason for Henry William Portman's decision to develop his London Estate.

In 1761 Henry William Berkeley Portman died and was succeeded by his son Henry William Portman junior (1738-96). Gainsborough's 'The White Lady', painted c1765, is a portrait of Ann Portman, the mother of Henry William Portman junior.

In 1873 Lord Portman was created 1st Viscount Portman.



Gainsborough's 'The White Lady', painted c1765, a portrait of Ann Portman, the mother of Henry William Portman Junior

Tyburn Gallows. An engraving of 1747 by William Hogarth

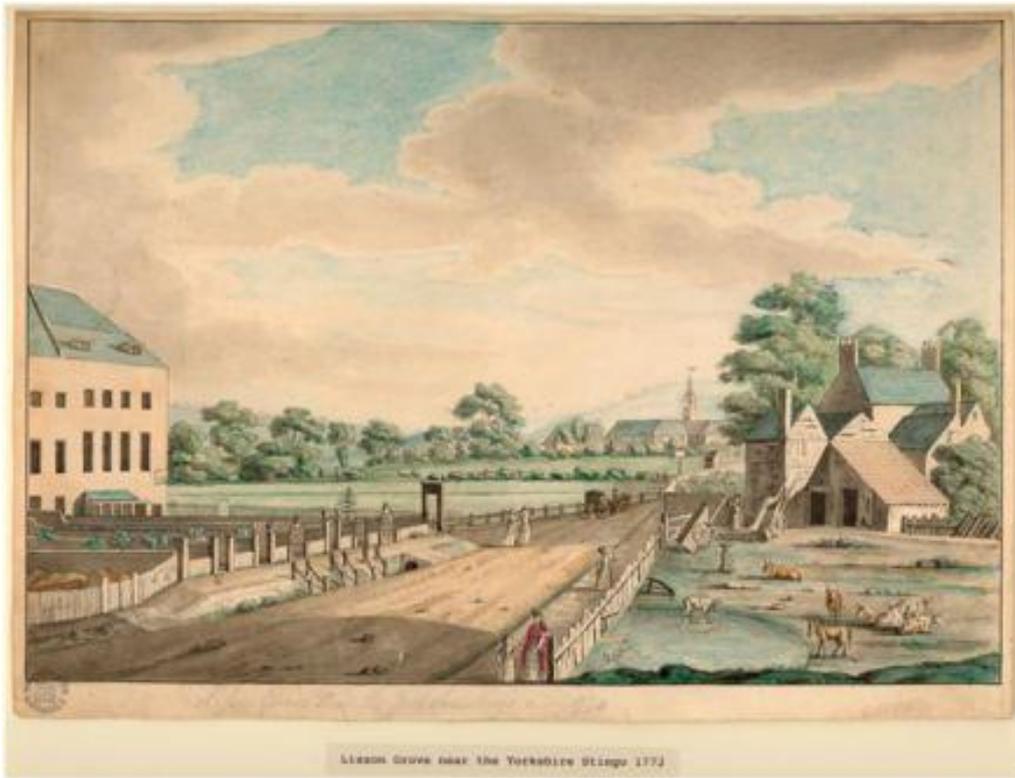
The gallows are shown on the 1769 map. Their probable site is now marked by a plaque on the traffic island at the junction of Oxford Street and Edgware Road. Hogarth's famous engraving of 1747 gives an idea of the massive crowds and disturbances generated by the executions.

Image credits: Westminster City Archives



By the mid-18th century building across the formally rural Marylebone was well under way as this engraving of Lisson Green in 1772 shows.

Image credits: Westminster City Archives



Lisson Grove near the Yorkshire Slings 1773

Today, Lisson Green (now in the parish of St Paul's Rossmore Road, looks rather different!



Image © Philip Wolmeth

1769 John Rocques's Map of London

By 1769, less than 15 years after building had begun on the Portman Estate, this extract from a later edition of John Rocque's 1745 map of London and its environs shows how rapidly development was progressing. The New Road, opened in 1756, is clearly marked and Portman Square and the streets around it are already well established.

Image credits: Westminster City Archives



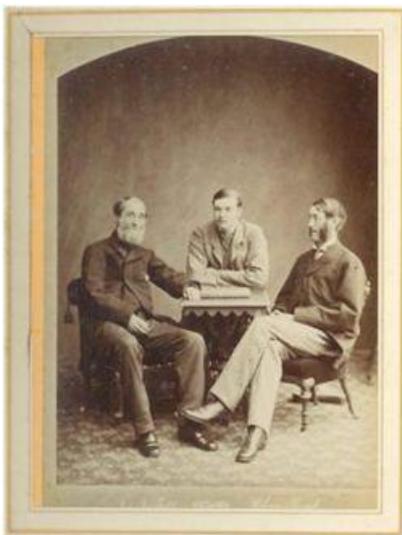
Baker Street Station and the pace of change

The rapid pace of development in Marylebone could not be better illustrated by the opening of the world's first Underground railway in 1863. In 1888 a large number of the Portman Estate's original leases came up for renewal. Rents went up, creating a huge growth in income for the Estate. Four years earlier Madame Tussauds moved to its new building on the Marylebone Road capitalising on the proximity of the Underground station.

Image credits: Westminster City Archives



The 1st Viscount died in 1888 and was succeeded by his son William Henry, shown here with his eldest son Edward William Henry

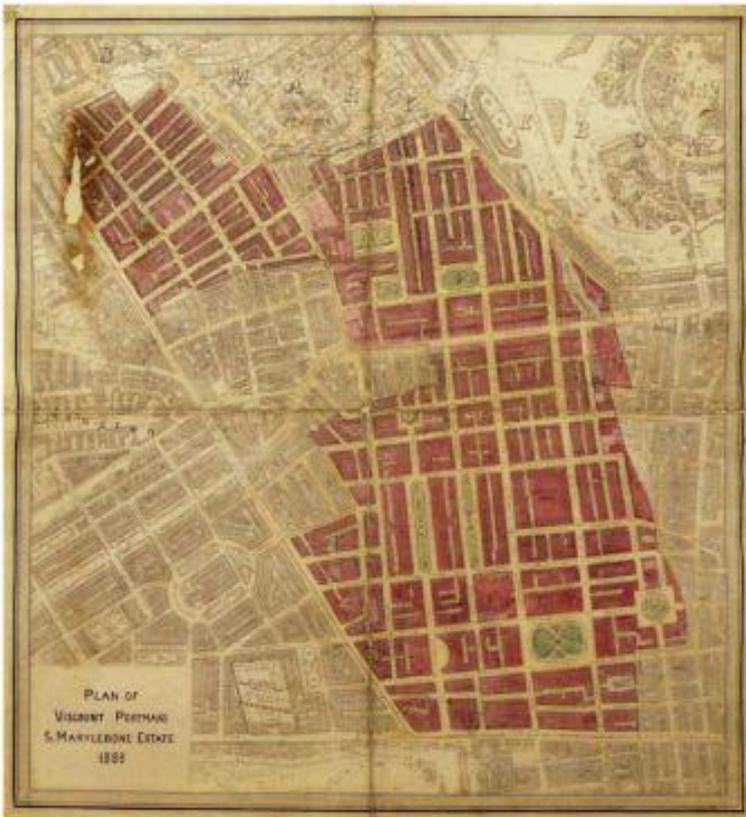


By the time of the 1st viscount's death, the family's central London, Marylebone, estate was well established. Flats gradually became popular during the second half of the 19th century and Portman and Montagu Mansions were built during the 1890s followed by many other large blocks in the 20th century. Meanwhile major philanthropic housing organisations such as the Artizans', Labourers' and General Dwellings Company were building blocks of flats for the poor. Portman Buildings in Lisson Grove, opened in 1888, was the first of these blocks to be built on the Estate, but there were several others including Seymour Buildings and Wendover Buildings.

With the introduction of death duties in 1893, the great aristocratic Estates had begun to be broken up and Lloyd George's 'People's Budget' of 1909 took this process even further. Mayfair's great mansions nearly all fell victim after the First World War. In 1919 the Marquess of Salisbury sold his Arlington Street home and Dorchester House and Grosvenor House (the Duke of Westminster's town house) in Park Lane were pulled down in the 1920s, to be replaced by hotels of the same name. Nash's Regent Street shop fronts were also demolished. Protests arose against the commercialisation and vulgarisation of dignified London by rapacious developers and E. M. Forster was not alone when he declared: 'Greed moulds the landscape of London.'

Commercial pressures over the past one hundred years have brought about a dilution in the original largely residential content of the Portman Estate. Many of the architecturally fine buildings remain, although they are now rarely in single-family occupation but instead have become residential conversions, private hotels, and commercial premises. During this period of change the Portman Estate and local planners have often tried to preserve the architectural style of the area. The essential theme of the architecture is late Georgian or Regency, with the façades of a number of newer schemes representing those periods.

The Portman Estate in 1888



Portman Mansions today



Baker Street in 1910



Image credits: Westminster City Archives



Past residents of Baker Street include William Pitt the Younger, the novelist Edward Bulwer-Lytton, and Sir Richard Burton, the explorer and orientalist - though its most famous residents were perhaps Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson...

William Henry, 2nd Viscount Portman, lived to the age of 90 and died in 1919. After serving as an MP for 33 years he became the first Chairman of Dorset County Council for a further 28 years, acted as Master of the Portman Hunt for over 50 years and rebuilt Bryanston House, seeing through many changes to the family's estates, both in London and in the West Country. His London home was at Montagu House in Portman Square. Throughout his life he also showed notable generosity towards his poorer tenants in the Church Street and Lisson Grove area of the London Estate.

After the People's Budget of 1909 death duties became a serious threat to every large estate in the country. Many were unable to survive. As a result of six viscounts dying within the space of less than 30 years, from 1919-1948, in order to meet the demands of taxation the Portman family was forced to sell all its West Country estates, once over 30,000 acres, including Bryanston, the family's main home.



Church Street Market in the 1960s

During the Second World War, the Luftwaffe inflicted heavy damage across London and changed the face of Marylebone for ever.



Bomb damage at the junction of Great Cumberland Place and Seymour Street.

After a year of the so-called 'phoney war' the Blitz began on 7th September 1940 ('Black Saturday'). Bombs first fell on Woolwich Arsenal, then on the docks. Over 1,400 incendiary canisters fell on docklands in the second week of September, and almost a thousand tons of high explosive. On 8th December the Luftwaffe dropped over 3,000 incendiary bombs - eight times more than on the first day of the Blitz.

The severest bombing raid of the whole Blitz came on 10th May 1941, when more civilians were killed than in any other single raid in Britain: 1,400. Some of these casualties were in Portman, Bryanston, and Montagu Squares. Reggie Cave was a young architect employed by the War Damage Commission, and remembers the impact the Luftwaffe made: 'The Mostyn Hotel in Portman Square was severely damaged, and what sticks in my mind was looking up at the hotel and being able to see directly into the bedrooms because the external wall of the building had been blown away, leaving the interior exposed. Some suitcases were never claimed. I suppose their owners had been obliterated by the blast. It's certainly true that the war destroyed whole areas of London, and The Portman Estate suffered extensive bomb damage.'

Altogether, 20,000 people died and another 25,000 were injured during the Blitz. Morale generally remained high despite the resentment of inept officialdom, and the crisis brought Londoners, traditionally deeply divided by class and district, closer together. 'It is not the walls that make the city, but the people who live within them,' George VI told London in 1940. 'The walls of London may be battered, but the spirit of the Londoner stands resolute and undismayed.'

However, the Blitz destroyed or damaged over 3.5 million London homes. Within the City itself 225 acres - about a third of its area - were devastated. This was little more than half the acreage that had been destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666 but the damage covered a far wider area, and the total reconstruction required was greater than after the Fire.

The Portman Estate itself suffered extensive bomb damage. In addition to the destruction of its Baker Street office and Montagu House in Portman Square, a cluster of incendiary bombs bisected Bryanston Square early in the war, and shattered its architectural symmetry for ever.

The war made London a less rooted place. Land tenure remained unaltered but the bonds tying owners and tenants to their buildings did change.

The Post War Portman Estate



After the death of the 7th Viscount in 1948, when the Portman Estate owed the huge sum of £7.6m in death duties, it was decided to sell the whole of the northern part of the London Estate, the area north of Crawford Street and the Marylebone Road. There were two sales, in 1951 and 1952.

Over 1,000 properties on the Portman Estate were destroyed or seriously damaged by bombing in the Second World War, providing an opportunity for a major programme of redevelopment in the 1950s and 1960s which has continued right up to the present day. In Portman Square, Orchard Court, which was built as early as 1930, was followed after the war by Fitzhardinge House and Carisbrooke House on the north side of the square and in 1970 by the Churchill Hotel. The south side of the square has been rebuilt most recently.

1960s St Marylebone and The Beatles



The enormous changes within society caused by the war were to go several stages further during the cultural earthquake of the 1960s. New York with its multi-cultural verve had been the dominant city of the '40s, and Rome, with its blend of chic and antiquity, the city of the '50s, but London was unquestionably the world capital of the '60s. Time Magazine's cover story labelled it 'Swinging London' - reflected in a stylish youth culture that was forward-looking, irreverent and self-confident. Bell-bottoms, the Beatles, and boutiques were dotted across London, and the Portman Estate was home to some of the most distinguished movers and shakers in that cultural revolution.

The Beatles' Apple shop at 94 Baker Street lasted for only a few months, closing in July 1968. In the end its psychedelic mural was thought to be a step too far, even in the London of the 1960s.

1970s The Changing Face of St Marylebone



Edgware Road, Marylebone's Western Boundary

Paralleling the emergence of an Arab community on the Estate during the 1970s has been a consolidation within the Jewish population, a feature of the area for much longer. In Upper Berkeley Street, close to the corner of Edgware Road, is the West London Synagogue, which was built in 1870 for the congregation of Jewish 'dissenters'. The Marble Arch synagogue in Great Cumberland Place came into existence in 1957 and was joined in 1991 by the congregation of the former Western Synagogue. Renamed the Western Marble Arch Synagogue and formerly the seat of the previous Chief Rabbi, Lord Jonathan Sacks, it can be described as one of the oldest and the newest congregations in the country.



Outside the synagogue is the statue of Raoul Wallenberg, the Swedish saviour of thousands of Jews from Nazi death-camps. In the words of Sidney Jaque, historian and member of the Western Marble Arch Synagogue: 'Wallenberg saved thousands of Jews from slaughter; he pretended that they were under Swedish control and nationality, and the Nazis didn't dispute it. But in 1945 Budapest fell to the Red Army and Wallenberg was taken under guard to Moscow where he vanished into the Soviet prison system.'

The unveiling of the statue in 1997 was a tremendous occasion: the Swedish royal family, the Secretary General of the United Nations, and the Queen and Prince Philip were all in attendance. In fact it was the first time the Queen had ever entered a synagogue, and the former Chief Rabbi, Dr Jonathan Sacks, made a special prayer for her. So it was an historic day to honour a truly great man.'