

2 Upper Wimpole Street

On land which originally formed part of Tyburn manor, Wimpole Street and Upper Wimpole Street were one of the principal elements in the fashionable development of St Marylebone, forming a sequence of fine Georgian houses built between 1780 and 1796. These houses, which were architecturally ambitious and which, externally, are little altered today, still present an 18th century street-scene on a scale rarely seen in London. In recognition of this the streets were designated as having buildings of architectural and historic interest and the houses remain listed under a preservation order of 1961.

Tyburn manor is recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086 as having a population of less than 50 and having a value of 52 shillings (£2.60). After being leased to a succession of tenants, in 1538 Henry VIII created, on the northern part of the estate, a Royal hunting park, Marylebone (now Regent's) Park, which was to remain as Crown land and so escape the subsequent spreading tide of urbanisation.

By the early 18th century the southern part of the original Tyburn estate consisted of Tyburn Manor House (first recorded 400 years earlier and standing where Terence Conran's fashionable restaurant, *The Orrery*, now stands) and the small country village of Marylebone: a few houses near the line of the present High Street with, to the south and east, tenanted farmland known as Marylebone Fields. Marylebone taking its name from the parish church of St Mary and the nearby Tyburn stream - hence St Mary by the Bourne.

Then owned by John Holles, Duke of Newcastle, who had bought the estate some years earlier for £17,500, in 1711 the Manor of Marylebone passed on his death to his only daughter, Henrietta Cavendish Holles, whose subsequent marriage to Edward Harley, 2nd Earl of Oxford, was to bring about the remarkable development seen today. For it was Edward Harley, whose family seat was Wimpole Hall in Cambridgeshire, who was to commission the architect, John Prince, to draw up a master plan for fashionable housing on what was then the Marylebone Fields, starting with Cavendish Square in 1717 and extending with a grid system of streets to the north, east and west.

Bounded by Oxford Street to the south, development was to continue throughout the 18th century, with streets taking their names from members of the family, their titles or estates. Harley Street and Wimpole Street, built of large family houses, with mews to accommodate staff and horses, were from the start popular with physicians and surgeons working at nearby teaching hospitals. By the middle of the 19th century the area had become firmly established as a medical quarter, and it was by then commonplace for a head leaseholder, occupying a house with his family and using one room as his consulting room, to allow colleagues to use other rooms for their own separate practices.

From 1792, when it was completed, No. 2 Upper Wimpole Street was occupied by Captain (later Lieutenant-Colonel Sir) James Boyce, whose family was to remain living here until long after the house passed into medical use. Sir James fought successfully in the Peninsular Wars of 1808, the storming of San Sebastian in 1813, and at Waterloo in 1815 where, on 18th June, he succeeded in holding the farmhouse at Hougomont against the fierce French cannonade. He died peacefully in his bed at No. 2 thirty years later, leaving his tenancy of the house to his son, Henry.

The census taken on Sunday, 5th April 1891 shows that the head of the household at that time was Caroline Boyce, Henry's 70-year-old widow, who was then living here together with her housekeeper, a lady's maid and a housemaid. Although 2 Upper Wimpole Street has been the professional address for many eminent physicians and surgeons during more than 100 years of medical use, it was at this time, April 1891, that the house was to provide a consulting room for, professionally, perhaps its least successful medical practitioner, but undoubtedly its most famous tenant.

It was on 1st April 1891 that Dr Arthur Conan Doyle, then aged 31, obtained use of the first-floor front room, with shared use of the waiting room, with the aim of establishing himself as a medical ophthalmologist. Conan Doyle's stay was to be brief, however, for despite failing to attract any patients to his rooms, he was nonetheless successful with his writing. By the summer of 1891 Conan Doyle had relinquished his one-year lease, 'forsook medicine altogether', and retired to South Norwood. Some years later, however, he did briefly return to medical practice by volunteering to serve as a physician during the worst conditions of the Boer War.

At 2 Upper Wimpole Street Conan Doyle wasted no time while waiting for patients to arrive at his rooms. By Friday, 3rd April 1891, his diary records: *sent 'A Scandal in Bohemia' to A. P. Watt*. This was the first of the Sherlock Holmes short stories, and Watt, his literary agent, immediately sent it on to the Strand Magazine, where the manuscript, signed 'A Conan Doyle / 2 Upper Wimpole Street / London W.', was stamped as being received on 6th April 1891. On Monday, 6th April, his diary notes: *got consulting room in order*, and by Friday, 10th April: *finished 'A Case of Identity'* (the second of The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes).

In all, the first five of the Holmes short stories were written here at 2 Upper Wimpole Street. We do not know whether ACD sent these manuscripts by post or by 'runner', but we do know that he posted letters to friends written on headed notepaper from 2, UPPER WIMPOLE STREET / W. One such letter, written in early April to a colleague in Birmingham, begins: *Just a line to say that I have got into my quarters here & have fairly settled down to work. I wish you could run down & have a look at my Consulting Room*. We also know, from the Ordnance Survey map of 1895, that a postbox was sited then, as now (although since replaced by an *ERII* box) on the corner opposite these rooms, and we can, perhaps, imagine ACD braving the pea-soupers, or at least the April showers, and dodging the hansoms to catch the post with the early manuscripts which were soon to make his name.

The Marylebone Estate, now the Howard de Walden Estate, remains one of London's great landed family estates. Strict control has for many years been exercised over the medical use of the houses, with only doctors, dentists and osteopaths allowed to practice from the principal north-south streets: Harley Street, Wimpole Street, Upper Wimpole Street and Devonshire Place; and ancillary practitioners, such as physiotherapists, practising in the east-west streets: Queen Anne, New Cavendish, Weymouth and Devonshire Streets.

This house remains in medical use with its four consulting suites occupied under separate medical tenancies. Although also occupied by domestic tenants, it is, perhaps, unfortunate that the house has long since lost the purpose for which it was built over 200 years ago: a family home echoing, above and below stairs, to the sounds of gentry life. It is interesting to note, however, that houses in the street are being returned to single-leaseholder family use with, across the street, one such family home having been recreated within the last few years.