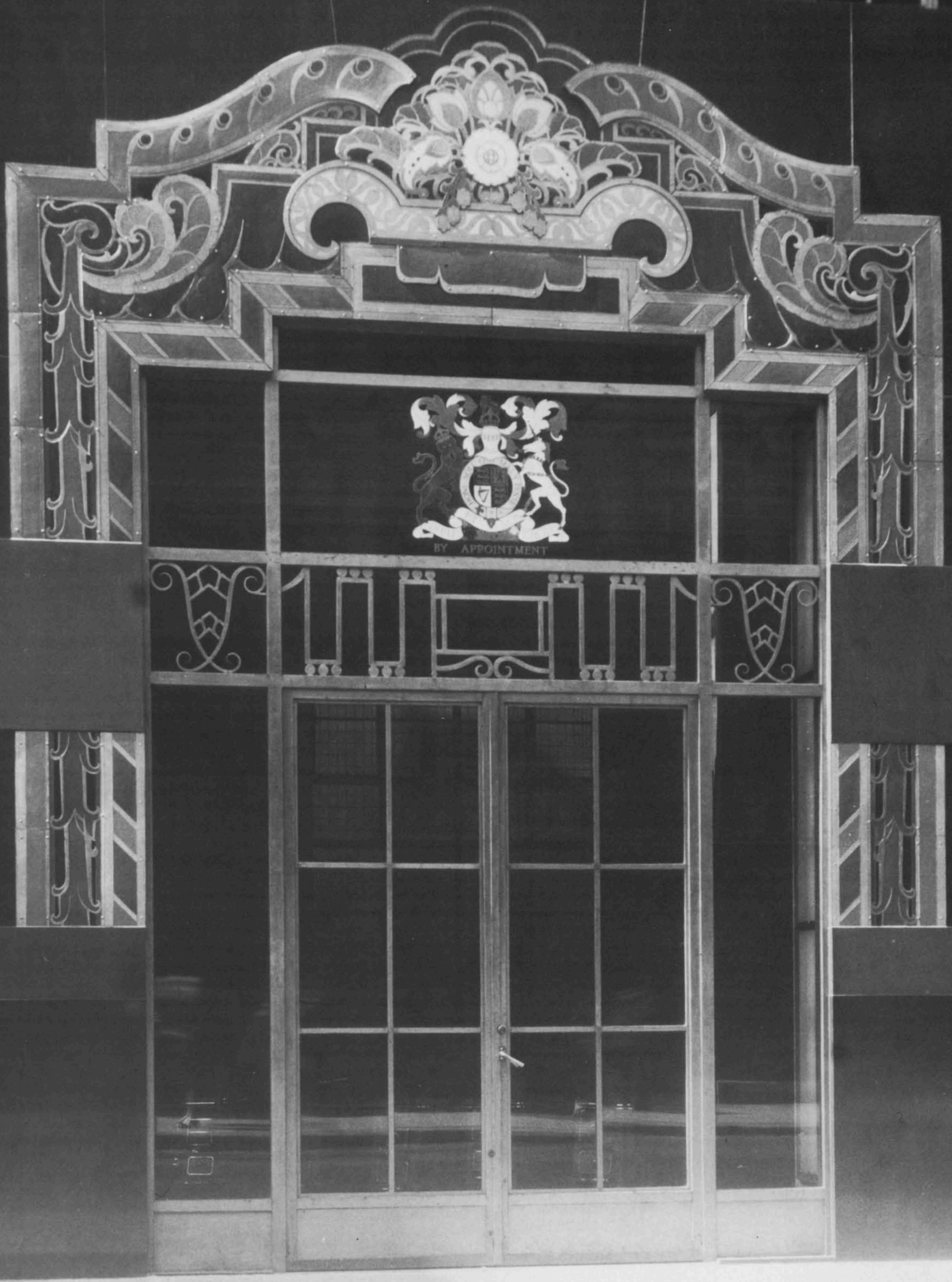

BY APPOINTMENT

AMERICANS IN LONDON

RAYMOND HOOD AND THE NATIONAL RADIATOR BUILDING

Andrew Saint

'Ray Hood was a good egg. Architecture needs about ten first class funerals of the higher-ups more than it needed his.'[1] Frank Lloyd Wright was parsimonious indeed with praise about his fellow-architects, Sullivan alone excepted. This pithy (and private) tribute to a rival whose architecture represented everything which Wright was readiest to despise — the big city, the Beaux-Arts tradition, and the forces of commerce — speaks more eloquently for Hood than any obituary. Raymond Hood was just 53 when he died in 1934. Fifty years afterwards, people are beginning to realize that he was a very great American architect, in this century second only perhaps to Wright himself. In Europe he is still scarcely known at all. Yet London has a worthwhile building by Hood: Ideal House, formerly the National Radiator Building, constructed in 1928-9 opposite Liberty's at the corner of Great Marlborough Street and Argyll Street. It is far from being a masterpiece. In his pitifully short but meteoric working span of twelve years (1922-34) Hood built few buildings, and that word is applicable only to the five great skyscrapers, one in Chicago and four in New York, which he designed or helped to design (Figs.2-6). Everything else is subsidiary to these magnificent monuments, still the most sophisticated contributions to the art of the tall building since the cathedral towers of the Middle Ages. Ideal House is worth discussing for just two reasons. One is to make Hood's exciting architecture known to a wider audience. The other is to try to answer a question which has broad (and current) architectural, historical and commercial ramifications: what was an American architect like Hood doing designing a building in London in the first place?

Hood's achievements and character have been nicely treated in a short biography by a younger contemporary, Walter H. Kilham Junior (1973).[2] Apart from the brevity of his career, one reason he has not been taken as seriously as he deserves is that he was a doer, not a talker, profoundly empirical (as practically all good architects must be) and with so extreme a hatred of theory and categorization that he was easily goaded into obstinacy, wit, perversity and self-contradiction, especially when asked to render any account of himself and his motives. He seems to have been an innately defensive, self-doubting character whom success brought half out of his shell, but only half. Hood's years of glory represented a complete reaction from a particularly intense and puritanical New England upbringing. His education was conventional but thorough and broad. First came Brown University at Providence, near his home town of Pawtucket, then MIT, where he studied architecture, then periods in good American offices, notably Bertram Goodhue's, and finally the crowning privilege of two spells at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, from which he graduated in 1911. Up till then he had been repressed and shy, but the fleshpots of Paris changed all that, and by the time his career was established he was known as a gregarious and witty bon viveur. A profile in the *New Yorker* for 1931 excellently captures his persona in these short but golden years: 'In any age Raymond Hood would have gone in the opposite direction to all other architects. It is impossible for him to run with the pack. . . . It is hard for him to agree with anyone. . . . He is fond of consuming milk and ginger cookies in the middle of the afternoon and applejack in the middle of the night.' He knows the classics but pretends not to: 'his infrequent reading nowadays is absurdly trivial'. Finally: 'few recognize his name. He does not care.'[3]

Frequently his bloody-mindedness tipped over into Hood's approach to architecture and occasionally into the architecture itself. The same sketch retails a story that a New York hostess asked him to doll up her house for a forthcoming visit of the Prince of Wales, later Edward VIII. Hood simply sent in an estimate: 'for masonry, $12.' The lady protested there was a crack somewhere in the plasterwork, to which he replied, 'Have a sporting print put over the crack.' The most celebrated instance of his perversity in bricks and mortar was the utterly unclassifiable Joseph Patterson House at Ossining (Fig.7), 'a mad distorted thing which owner and creator both like tremendously', swathed in green, yellow, red and blue stripes. Yet Hood built himself a perfectly polite neo-Georgian house on the waterfront at Stamford, Connecticut.

All this carefully cultivated individualism should not obscure the fact that among Raymond Hood's greatest strengths was his ability to collaborate — an ability essential for any architect who wished to work successfully with the great moguls of American finance. Like other New York architects of his period, Hood always worked in partnership, and as he became more successful his office naturally became larger and the relationships more complicated. All his skyscrapers were the products of a team, and the fifth and most famous of them, the RCA Building, involved no less than three architectural partnerships in a very intricate arrangement with the builders, financiers and owners. That is not

1. Ideal House, London, by Raymond Hood and C. Gordon Jeeves, 1929. Detail of doorway.

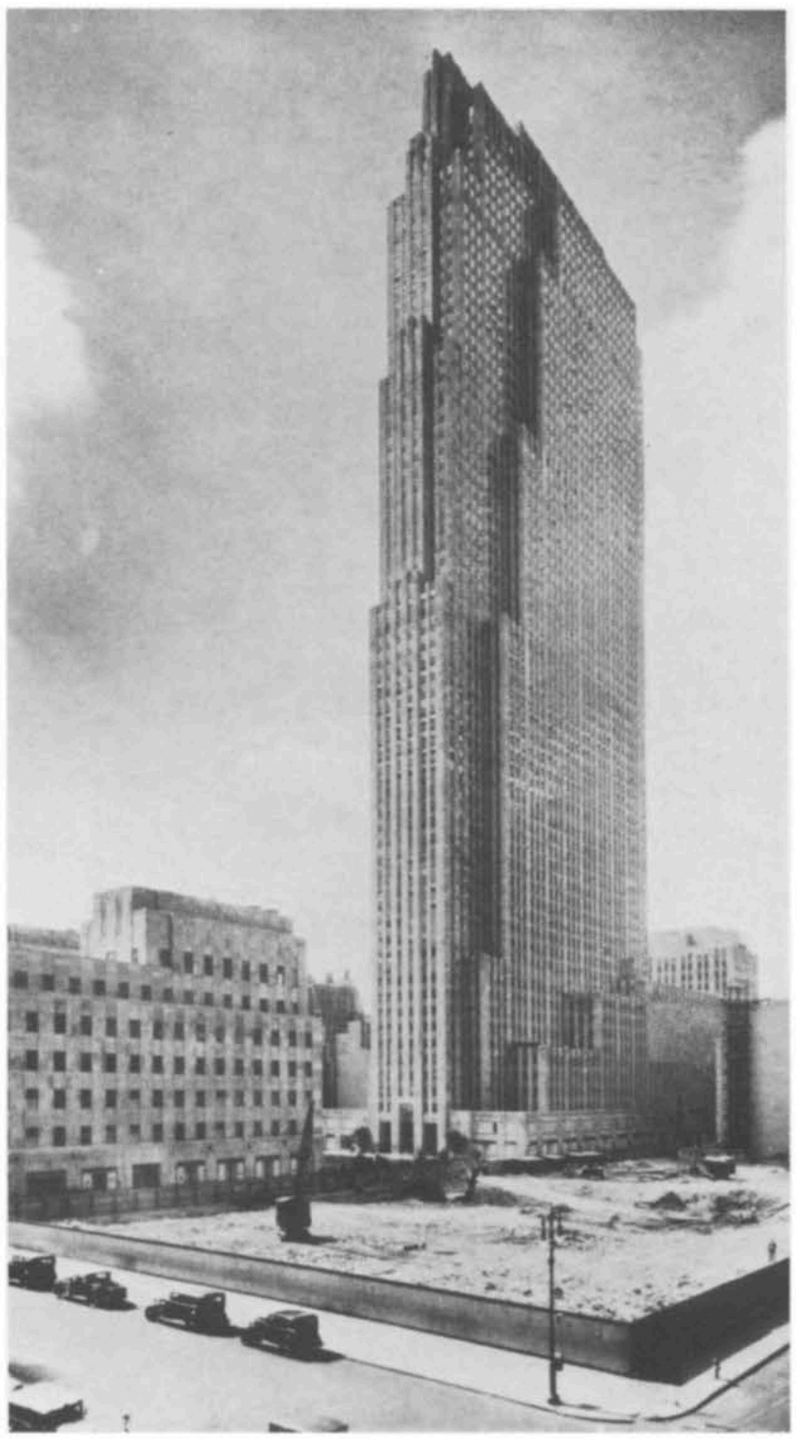




2. Chicago Tribune Tower, by John Mead Howells and Raymond Hood, 1923-5.
3. American Radiator Building from Bryant Park, New York City, by Hood and André Fouilhoux, 1923-4.







4. Daily News Building, New York City, by Howells and Hood, 1929-30.
5. McGraw-Hill Building, New York City, by Hood, Godley and Fouilhoux, 1931-2.
6. RCA Building, Rockefeller Center, New York City, by Hood, Godley and Fouilhoux with Corbett, Harrison and MacMurray, and Reinhard and Hofmeister, 1931-3.

to lessen the extent of Hood's own contributions. The concept and appearance of the Chicago Tribune, American Radiator, Daily News and McGraw-Hill Buildings seem to have been almost entirely his, while at the RCA Building his role was evidently still the most authoritative and 'creative'.[4]

The Chicago Tribune competition of 1922 was what catapulted Hood to fame. Up to that point Hood had been fancied as a promising architect, but he had had very little work and was close to despair. When told he had won, 'he sat stunned at the telephone, immovable for an hour', then went on a spending spree.[5] The competition itself is almost too well known. Its generous prizes, open brief and lavish publicity attracted many tiresome European entries and even more tiresome criticism afterwards. The fashionable and oft-repeated argument was that Eliel Saarinen ought to have won. In fact Hood's plan (technically by John Mead Howells and Hood, but Hood did the lion's share of the work) was the more accomplished. None of the Europeans, indeed, had the real practical understanding of up-to-date skyscraper planning manifested by Hood and the other New Yorkers. By this time the lead in this field had passed firmly from Chicago to New York, and the result of the Chicago Tribune competition confirmed this. Hood's entry was essentially a development of the Woolworth Building, that is to say, it built on the particular tradition of speculative office planning with multiple lifts established in New York before 1914 and on the idea that the external articulation and modelling for a multi-storey building ought more naturally to be Gothic than Classic.

Hood's special genius, I would like to argue, lay in this 'Gothic' conception of skyscraper-modelling. It can be traced through from the overt pinnacles and finials of the Chicago Tribune to the elegant abstract recessions and planes of the Daily News and RCA Buildings. Using this method, Hood became by far the most sophisticated and satisfying modeller of skyscraper forms ever to have worked. We can still afford to learn from his talent; indeed the shapelessness of many of our tall buildings since his death, including such recent aberrations as Philip Johnson's AT&T Building, betray a lamentable unwillingness of modern architects to learn from the Gothic tradition. Hood took time to develop his modelling. Both the Chicago Tribune and its immediate successor, the American Radiator Building in New York, are far from integrated all the way from bottom to top. The key to this, as indeed to the development of all the stacked-up skyscrapers of inter-war New York, is the famous zoning 'envelope', the system devised by Harvey Wiley Corbett and others to reconcile the new regulations for light and air which came into force in 1916 with the maximum permissible floor space in high buildings. This initiative encouraged a far more 'plastic' approach to skyscraper form. By nature Hood was always a fervent modeller. Full-size models were prepared for details of the Chicago Tribune tower (Fig.8), and in his later buildings a lot of the essential thinking seems to be represented by

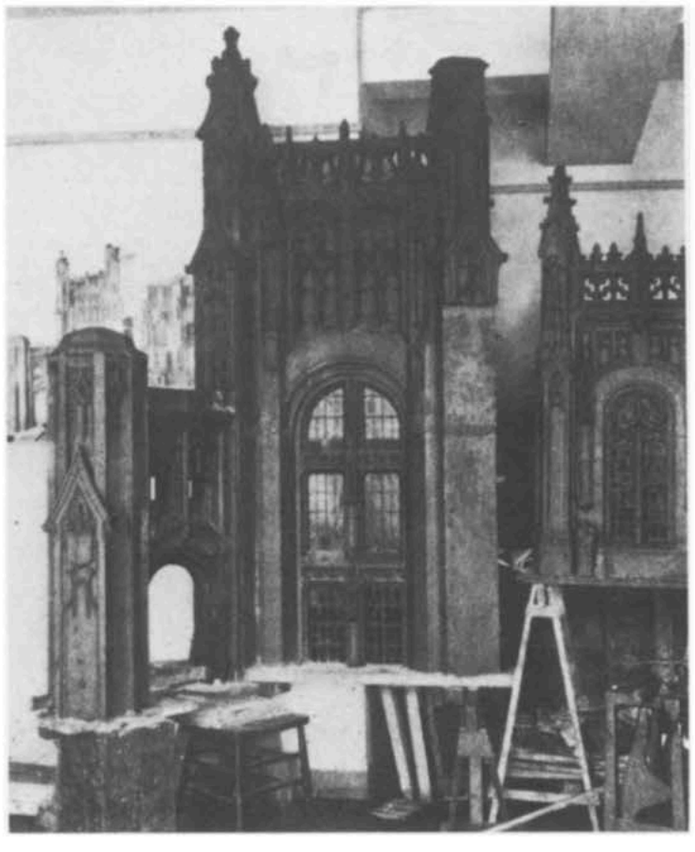
a series of small clay models of increasingly bold and simple type (Fig.9).

The other realm in which Hood reigned supreme (or, if not supreme, equalled only by another New York skyscraper architect, Ely Jacques Kahn) was colour. Here at least his ideas were able to survive the Atlantic crossing; what Ideal House lacks in profile and modelling, it makes up for in colour and texture. Hood's experiments in colouring tall buildings seem to have started with his second skyscraper, the relatively small American Radiator Building facing New York's Bryant Park, put up in 1924 for the parent company whose British subsidiary later commissioned the London building. Perhaps because the American Radiator site is too confined to make much of a splash with form, Hood built it in black and gold, black granite for the base, grey-black bricks above and gold trimmings above (Figs.3,10). This, be it noted, was before the Paris Exhibition of 1925, which is generally supposed to have ushered in 'Art Deco' and colours such as these. Why did he use such a scheme? The commonest theory was that it was a form of advertisement for the radiator company, 'the black of the main structure suggesting a huge coal pile, and the gold and yellow of its higher points the glow of flames of an unbanked fire'.[6] Of course Hood promptly denied the imputation, but it is probably true in some measure. He simply suggested that he was fed up designing white or beige buildings punctuated with black holes and wanted to do the contrary.[7] There is perhaps a further point which Ideal House, again in black and gold, may help to confirm: weathering. High urban buildings take more punishment than most and are apt to weather badly and sometimes unattractively, especially in smoky climates. Black and gold, especially in London, may have been an experiment to combat weathering and discolouration. By this time terracotta, the pre-war choice for cladding on most American skyscrapers, was out of fashion, largely because of Beaux-Arts prejudice against it. Hood considered it for the American Radiator Building, only to reject it. But the fact that he considered it at all may indicate that he had permanence of texture and colour in mind.

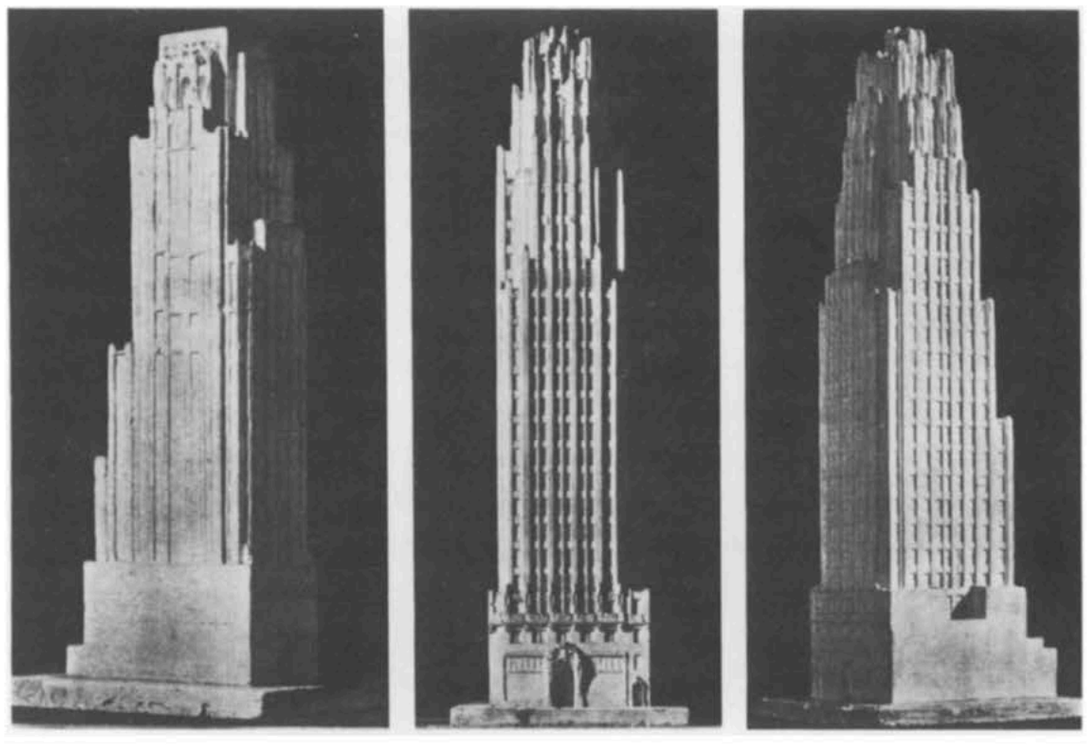
In later skyscrapers, the Daily News, McGraw-Hill and RCA Buildings, Hood developed his ideas about profile, modelling and colour within the exacting context of the 'zoning envelope' and the demands of office planning and financing (Fig.11) — demands which became harsher after the crash of October 1929 imposed formidable stringencies on new skyscrapers. Remarkably, all these great buildings were erected (or, in the case of the Daily News, finished) after the crash. Perhaps without the crash Hood



7. Captain Joseph Patterson's house at Ossining, New York, by Raymond Hood, 1930.



8. Models in clay for the Chicago Tribune Tower.



9. American Radiator Building. Three successive models in clay by Raymond Hood, c.1923-4.

would have had even more work; but then perhaps his health would have given way sooner. Five splendid buildings are not much, but they are sufficient to recognize a great architect. They remain the aesthetic measure against which to set all New York's other skyscrapers, whether taller like the Empire State Building, flashier like the Chrysler Building, or purer like the Seagram Building. They have yet to be surpassed.

I come on now to my second task, which is to try to explain why Hood should have been designing a building in London at all. Put baldly, the question seems rather stupid and chauvinistic. Why after all should an American architect not have been doing so, if he was asked to? But in context, it raises some interesting issues about London and indeed Britain in the inter-war period.

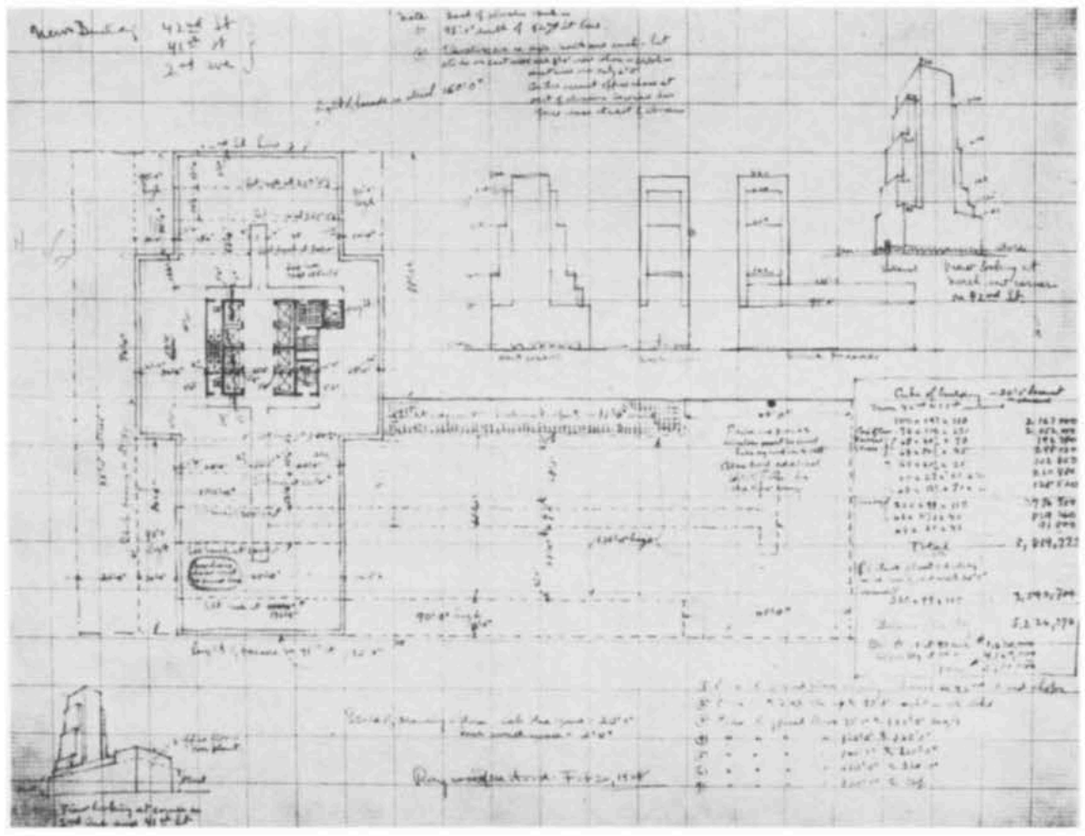
We have perhaps been slow to appreciate, or rather recollect, that there was a mini-invasion of British architecture from the United States between the wars. So much ink has been spilt on assessing the European influence on British architecture during this period that we have inadvertently turned our backs on the equally potent infiltration of American architectural ideas. Undoubtedly the 1920s was the decade when this was at its height, but strictly speaking it persisted for about thirty years, 1908 to 1939, equivalent roughly to the period of the great liners. Strangely, there has been less overt American architectural influence, or at least less building in London by American architects, since the era of transatlantic flights began; but then since the war it has been less easy to isolate anything as distinctly national in the urban architecture of any Western country. There is Eero Saarinen's American Embassy, and we now have before us the bizarre prospect of an office block by a defunct, adopted-American architect, Mies van der Rohe, for Mansion House Square. But these are rather exceptions which prove the rule. Compared to the inter-war period, post-war London has been strangely resistant to American architectural habits and ideas.

Of course the background to that earlier invasion, starting before the First World War, was cultural and economic. It is aptly summed up in a passage from Thomas Burke's *London in my Time*, published in 1934:

> The first quarter of this century, indeed, may be known to history as London's American Phase, since the major part of the many and rapid changes it has suffered may be traced to America. Our tube railways we owe to America. The bulk of our entertainment is American in quality and largely in personnel. All our latest hotels derive from American



10. Lower portion of the American Radiator Building. Black granite below, grey-black brickwork above, gold trimmings.



11. Daily News Building. First studies on squared paper by Hood, 1928.

models. Our snack-bars and all-night supper-stands are pirated from America. Our electric night-signs are an American idea. Our street songs are American. Our popular press models itself upon American journalism, and on our bookstalls English periodicals lie smothered and half seen under piles of American magazines. . . . Our one-way streets and automatic traffic controls are American. Where we knew little individual shops we now find giant stores, run on the American plan; and the threepenny and sixpenny store is so much a feature of almost every large street, both in and out of London, that we almost forget its American origin. . . . The American yeast, working constantly upon it these last twenty years, has done so much good that we now regard the zest and pungency of London life, which the States gave us, as our own growth.[8]

One might quibble with a detail or two on this list, but the general claim is just. Putting less emphasis on appearances, one could say that it represents the inroads made upon the British economic system even before the First World War by American capital, American goods, and American methods of manufacture. In many areas these were forces of revitalization, as Thomas Burke suggests.[9] The impact of all this was especially profound in the 1920s, when the trading links forged between the two countries during the war were consolidated by a tremendous American boom.

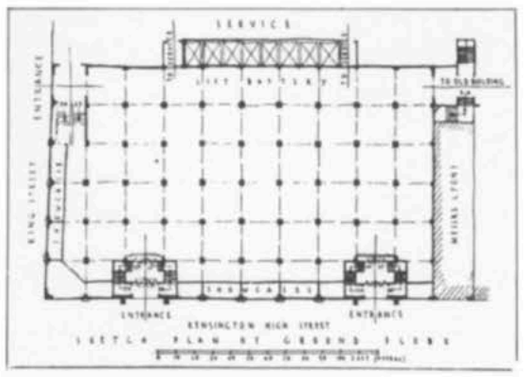
So everywhere there was a response to American models. In this sense, the appearance of American buildings in London is the tip of an iceberg, but an instructive tip. Selfridges (Fig.12) of course was the first American-designed building in London. It certainly wasn't the first American building in England; that distinction probably belongs to the lamented Lululaund at Bushey, designed for the eccentric painter Herkomer by H.H. Richardson. Gordon Selfridge was himself an American who had been with the mammoth Marshall Field Company of Chicago. He was the only man ever to dare to build a great new store in London from scratch rather than develop it up slowly, and in the end it virtually broke even him. It was natural for Selfridge to use American architects, the celebrated D.H. Burnham and Company. Burnham's firm had already rebuilt Wanamaker's in Philadelphia and were to go on to design the Marshall Field retail store in Chicago as well as Filene's in Boston. In 1906-8, the dates of the first part of Selfridges, there were no comparable store specialists among British architects, though several stores had been rebuilt or were in process of rebuilding, notably Harrods. More crucially, there was an utterly different attitude on the part of British and American architects towards plan and elevation in stores, fostered in part by the greater stringency of London building regulations and in part by the lesser availability of capital for expansion in London. Harrods, for example, was rebuilt piece by piece, with thick dividing walls between the chunks, flats over two floors only of retailing, and no great coherence of arrangement.[10] At Selfridges, D.H. Burnham and Company's attempts to make the store plan open soon encountered difficulty with the regulations and had to be compromised with help from British architects, first Frank Atkinson and then J.J. Burnet. The famous elevation appears mostly to have been by an independent American architect, Francis Swales. So from the very beginning, American architects operating in London found themselves enmeshed in complexities. But their willingness to work with discipline, enthusiasm, idealism and scale on commercial projects made a profound impression, notably on Selfridges' rivals.

As Burke intimates, it is in stores in particular that the American influence most quickly spreads. Hardly a London store was rebuilt between 1910 and 1935 without some direct obeisance to the great giant order along the front of Selfridges. The case of Derry and Toms (Fig.13), reconstructed in 1929-33, is specially instructive.[11] This store had fallen into the hands of John Barker and Company, whose principal directors, Trevor Bowen and Syd-



12. Selfridges, by Francis Swales and D.H. Burnham and Co. with R. Frank Atkinson, 1906-8. The original and seminal portion of the Oxford Street front.







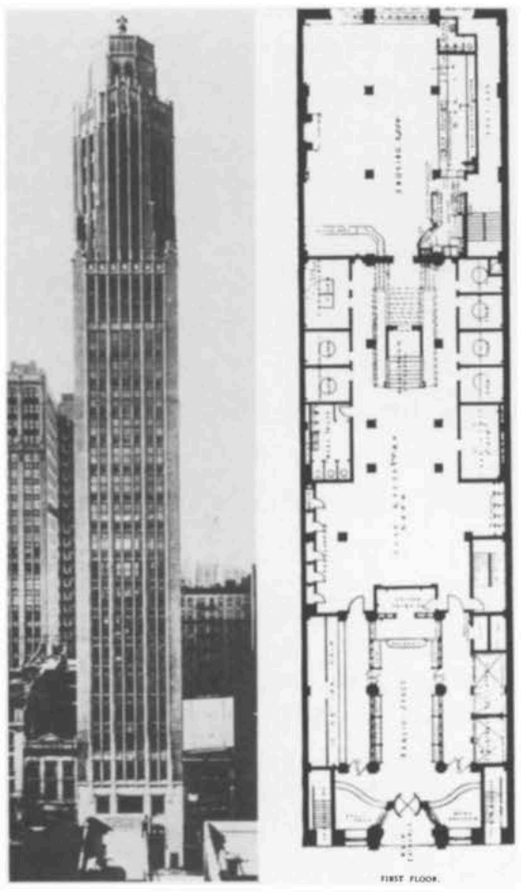
13. Derry and Toms, by Bernard George and C.A. Wheeler, 1929-33. Exterior view; store plan showing the retailing space opened up according to the American precedent; and the serried row of lifts. Lift faces modelled by Walter Gilbert.

ney Skinner, were great enthusiasts for American methods of retailing and had made several trips to the States to study and imitate it. When they had extended Barkers on the north side of Kensington High Street in 1923, they came close to choosing American architects, toying with Graham, Anderson, Probst and White (as D.H. Burnham and Company had become) or Starrett and Van Vleck, the architects of the new Macy's in New York. In the end they played safe and opted for English architects. But when it came to Derry and Toms they got their in-house architect, the very able Bernard George (an ex-AA man closely associated with Robert Atkinson) to do the elevations and the décor, but left the detailed floor layouts to an American, C.A. Wheeler of Chicago. American firms also supplied some of the mechanical equipment, notably the lift cars. When Derry and Toms was published, Skinner and Bowen were careful to keep quiet about this arrangement, perhaps fearing some sort of outcry at a time of depression. But they did not hesitate to repeat the arrangement when the main site of Barkers was rebuilt from 1935 onwards. Barkers, unlike Derry and Toms, incorporated escalators, another innovation of American planning which was accepted in stores only after much argument with the London Fire Brigade. In fact the whole history of planning in London department stores between the wars is one of gradual, grudging official acceptance of American innovation.

A less concentrated but more widespread illustration of the American planning revolution is presented by office buildings in the same period. Here too an American-designed building offered the stimulus for harder-headed planning combined with architectural scale. This was Bush House, the prominent block in the centre of the Aldwych site, looking up Kingsway. As there are interesting parallels between Bush House and Ideal House, and the former is better documented, it is worth going a little into its history.

Just as Ideal House followed on from the American Radiator Building, so Bush House (1920 etc.) succeeded another New York skyscraper, the Bush Terminal Building of 1917-18 (Fig.14). In this case, the architects for both buildings were Helmle and Corbett, in other words mainly Harvey Wiley Corbett. The promoter of the two Bush buildings was Irving T. Bush (1869-1948), an international shipper who from about 1910 onwards developed a vast warehousing and docking complex in south Brooklyn. It seems as if Bush profited greatly from the war-trading between Britain and the United States. The Bush House site had been vacant for many years; it was the centre-piece of the London County Council's Kingsway-Aldwych redevelopment, but various ambitious plans for the site had all fallen through. During the period of the Anglo-American joint war effort, 1917-18, it had been used as a social centre for American forces in London. It was during this period that Irving Bush made his proposal for a big 'international exchange' here with office space. In the event the 'exchange' seems not to have amounted to much. Instead Bush built offices in three phases, a thin central section with a massive entrance facing northwards (1920) (Fig.15) followed by bigger and duller flanking blocks (1928-9). Even the little tower designed to crown the central section and shown in a sketch by Hugh Ferris (Fig.16) was in the end omitted.[12]

Corbett, Bush's architect, was perhaps the most important innovator in skyscraper planning in the crucial phase after the Woolworth Building. His Bush Terminal Building is not well known, but it fills a gap between the better known Woolworth and American Radiator Buildings. It is 'Gothic', and it is one of the first high buildings put up after the 1916 zoning rules. Furthermore, it stands close to the American Radiator Building, and it was from the back of this very skyscraper that Raymond



14. Bush Terminal Sales Building, New York City, by Helmle and Corbett, 1917-18. One of the earliest skyscrapers to be built following the New York zoning rules of 1916.



15. Kingsway looking south towards Aldwych in the early 1920s, with Bush House in the centre. The photograph precedes the addition of wings to Bush House by Corbett, Harrison and MacMurray in 1928-9.
16. Bush House, perspective sketch by Hugh Ferris showing front of centre toward Strand as originally intended by Helmle and Corbett. The tower was never built.

Hood 'borrowed' the bricks that he was to use to such effect on the American Radiator front.[13] So the links between these buildings are close. The one interesting difference is that Corbett, always more conventional elevationally than Hood, switched from straight Gothic to straight classic in the transition from New York to London; probably this was indicated by the important Aldwych site. Hood too switched styles, but he stuck effectively to his black and gold idiom in both cities.

About the central section of Bush House, with its overscaled entrance and long, thin lobby leading to multiple lifts, there is a half-finished quality which may lead one to wonder whether Bush and Corbett were not counting on the sudden overthrow of contemporary London building regulations, with their firm ordinance of an eighty-foot limit to the cornice, and contemplating the superimposition of a high building to dominate the magnificent vista along Kingsway. As far as I know there is neither documentary nor structural evidence to support this. Nevertheless, as far as it goes, which is not very far, Bush House is a copy-book example of American office planning on the steel-framed principle, still in 1920 quite new in London. Some of the principles which actuated Corbett are given neatly in an article he wrote in 1924. Before even a site is contemplated, he says, an architect

> must have a general idea of how many cubic feet of building are required to provide one square foot of rentable office space. A calculation made on a large number of well planned office buildings shows that 16 cubic feet are required to make one square foot of rentable floor space possible. . . . Stairways in American office buildings are merely fire escapes, they are so seldom used. . . . British practice, which limits the heights of buildings to nine or at the most ten stories, provides one conspicuous open stairway and then has one or more enclosed sets of stairs as in American cities. The tenants will actually use this open stairway, even when ample elevator service is provided. Such is the influence of habit. The location of stairs in America is only a matter of utilizing dark spaces in the plan not suitable for any other purpose, and putting the stairs in them. . . .
>
> Elevators are an essentially American development; their use here (*in the US*) is almost universal and would be sometimes regarded as necessary even in a two-storey building. . . . Elevators should be grouped together because the efficiency of the service is greatly enhanced. Even a small building must have at least two (to meet the emergency of a breakdown), and if more are needed, because of a greater floor area or greater number of stories, they should be so placed that a tenant waiting for a car may be able to step easily to the first one that flashes a signal. A battery of six elevators, three facing three, is the ideal arrangement.[14]

This kind of doctrine of plan is carried out in all the New York skyscrapers of the 1920s. To some degree it percolates into London office buildings of the inter-war years, notably those of American-influenced practices like Burnet, Tait and Lorne (Adelaide House) or Trehearne and Norman (Africa House, Kingsway). But even in these, as Corbett says, you always find much more open space for a big staircase. Often this entrance hall is a fine thing, but what London misses are the gay, highly coloured, tight elevator lobbies which are so enjoyable a feature of the New York skyscrapers of these years.

I have said that the style of Bush House is orthodox classic: pompously so at the front facing Kingsway, residually so in the later side sections, but at the rear facing the Strand there is an authentic whiff of the quattrocento — a style pioneered by McKim, Mead and White in New York, very popular there for many years, but rare in European Beaux-Arts classicism after the turn of the century. The chief English exceptions to this rule are C.H. Reilly and his disciples of the Liverpool school. This leads naturally on to consideration of the last main example I want to give of an American-designed London building of the inter-war years, Devonshire House, Piccadilly (1924-6) (Fig.17), done in exactly this manner by Carrere and Hastings with Reilly's help.

With Devonshire House we move on to luxury flats, which with hotels represent a third building type in which American influence is strong in these years. The story of the building is told, I presume accurately and fairly, in Reilly's autobiography, *Scaffolding in the Sky*. The background starts with a first visit by Reilly to the States in 1909, financed by Lord Leverhulme. He, like other Beaux-Arts admirers in England, was profoundly struck by the efficiency of American architectural office organization and drawing technique. Robert Atkinson from the AA also went to the States in 1921, and from about this date there was a continual flow of students, particularly from Liverpool but also from the Manchester and the AA schools, spending time in East Coast offices and learning how to run big jobs and organize drawings better. Reilly struck up a particular friendship with Thomas Hastings, the designer of the New York Public Library and foremost disciple of the ideals of Charles McKim.[15]

The Devonshire House site had been bought by Holland and Hannen and Cubitts, practically the only big outward-looking London builders of the inter-war years. According to Reilly, the idea of going to an American came from their managing director, J.B. Stevenson, who told him, 'We think the right thing to do is to build an American apartment house upon it, costing about two millions. It is very important we should get the right American architect for the job. You, I believe, know them all. Will you give me the names of six of their leading men and their qualifications.' So Hastings got the job. The team which actually worked on Devonshire House consisted of Hastings, Shreve and Lamb, who had just done the Standard Oil Building in New York in the old-fashioned, pre-Corbett manner, with quattrocento details. Shreve and Lamb were to go on to be the main partners on the Empire State Building. Reilly had little to do with the job, especially after the northern two-thirds of the site were sold off, but he did claim that his original massing of the front survived. So Devonshire House as built is virtually a pure American building: American in its Bramantesque style certainly, in the placing of the lifts and in



17. Devonshire House, Piccadilly, London, by Carrere and Hastings with C.H. Reilly, 1927.

the number and position of its bathrooms, but American most of all in its methods of work. Reilly professed himself bowled over above all by the progress schedule, by the regular meetings and by the speed of the building's erection. In other words, Devonshire House is an eloquent testimony to the fact that clients went to American architects for management and efficiency, not just, if at all, for aesthetics.[16]

I have strayed far in both scale and mood from Raymond Hood's modest building in Great Marlborough Street, but I hope I have conveyed some sense of why people admired and wanted American buildings in the 1920s, and why it could be worth sticking with American architects despite the inevitable clashes over building regulations. There are other London examples in the 1930s. Probably the most prominent is the Earl's Court Exhibition Building of 1936-7, designed by C. Howard Crane of Chicago with a contract run by a formidable American firm of builder-managers of a type previously unknown in England, Hegeman-Harris Incorporated. Crane had a London office for several years and produced some projects for flats. In about 1934, indeed, Hegeman-Harris and Crane got together with Corbett, Harrison and MacMurray (of Bush House) and Hood and Fouilhoux (of the two Radiator buildings) in producing an 'international music hall and opera house' for the St George's Hospital site at Hyde Park Corner (Fig.18). This ambitious project follows on in some sense from the Rockefeller Center, on which Corbett and his partners and Hood and his partners had been collaborating. An album of the designs, which bear rather too close a resemblance to Radio City Music Hall at Rockefeller Center, survives in the RIBA Drawings Collection, but nothing much seems known about the venture; it may have been no more than a bright idea. If you scratch around, you can stumble across other unfulfilled American projects for London in these years. Warren and Wetmore (of Grand Central Station) put in a scheme for Grosvenor House in about 1925; and at some stage the Rockefeller family architects Delano and Aldrich had something in mind for the 'Hampton site' next to the National Gallery. Doubtless other examples could be found.



18. Proposed International Music Hall and Opera House for the St George's Hospital site at Hyde Park Corner, London, by Corbett, Harrison and MacMurray, Hood and Fouilhoux, and C. Howard Crane, c.1934-5.

One thing, however, distinguishes Ideal House from the other American-designed projects which came to fruition in the 1920s. Bush House and Dorchester House, however imposing, were conservative in appearance; Ideal House by contrast was a bit of a shocker. I want to conclude by looking at it more carefully, giving the few facts which seem to be known about it, and showing how it struck and influenced English critics.

Of its genesis nothing seems to be known, though perhaps there are American Radiator records still in New York which might yield something. The National Radiator Company which commissioned the building left long ago and is now defunct, and the ground floor is given over, fitly perhaps, to an 'American Strikes' hamburger joint, in succession to a Tennessee Pancake House. Raymond Hood probably sorted out the arrangements for the design when he was over here as a juror for the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in 1928.[17] As his English collaborator he chose the young and then unknown Gordon Jeeves, later architect for the Dolphin Square complex in Pimlico. Jeeves was not an inspiring architect, though technically competent, and it seems unlikely that he had much to do with the basic design.[18] Later Jeeves himself did much to ruin the scale and poise of the building by adding on an extension along Argyll Street equal in size and style to the original building (1935) (Fig.26). Jeeves also perpetrated the earliest and flashiest imitation of Ideal House in the shape of nearby Everyman House, Oxford Street (Fig.19), the West End



19. Drage's, Nos.71-77 Oxford Street, London, by C. Gordon Jeeves, 1930-1. Original portion of the front.



20. Polish National Alliance Building, competition entry by Raymond Hood, c.1925.



21. Rex Cole showroom, Flushing, New York, by Raymond Hood, 1931. This was the most 'modernistic' of the several showrooms designed by Hood for the Rex Cole firm.

'flagship' of Drage's, a now-forgotten department store (1930-1).

The massing and scale of Ideal House (Fig.22) are, of course, different from Hood's American skyscrapers, but they do not lack skill. There are a couple of Hood projects for similar corner sites which are relevant, an earlier competition design for the Chicago headquarters for the Polish National Alliance (Fig.20), and a later showroom at Flushing, New York, for the Rex Cole firm (Fig.21). Naturally the earlier design is more classical, the later one freer in vocabulary, but all three have in common nice, sensible, square proportions and a neat, unfussy finish for the top: an elegantly recessed attic for the Polish National Alliance Building and Ideal House, a queer little circular feature for the Rex Cole building. In all three cases Hood, as he does more magnificently in his skyscrapers, avoids that besetting sin of modern architecture, a crude and curtailed summit.

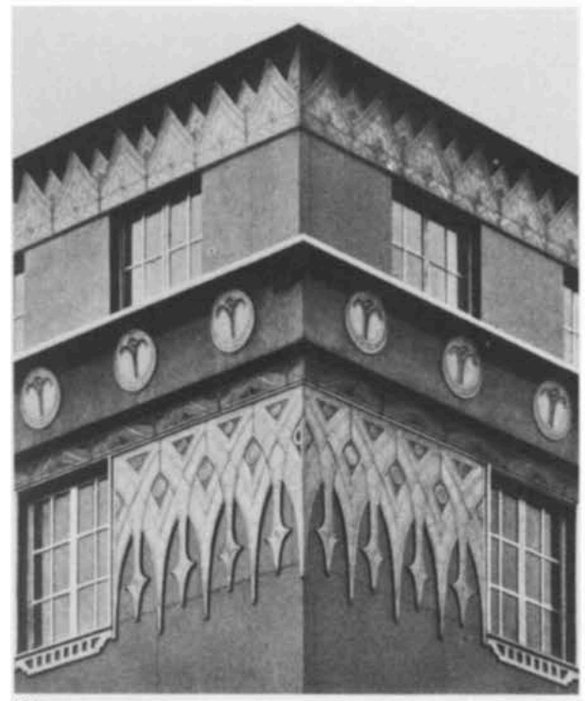
Inside, there is not and never was much to say about Ideal House.[19] It was never big enough to have any planning interest, so there was no American elevator lobby or anything of that nature. The plan (Fig.23) is just as an English architect might have arranged it, with a tenants' entrance in Argyll Street and the grander entrance to the Radiator showroom from Great Marlborough Street. This showroom, long gone, was a throw-back to the McKim, Mead and White manner, with a broad travertine staircase down to the basement display and plenty of opulent cinquecento plasterwork in the ceiling. In early photographs the radiators and stoves look rather bewildered and lost, standing around naked against this Gonzaga-like backdrop (Fig.24). One comes back with some relief to the facing and detailing: black, shiny slabs of Scandinavian granite, large but thin, cramped on to brickwork and set off by a green granite coping and a sparing amount of Art Deco edging in bronze and enamel, carried out by the Birmingham Guild (Figs.1,25). Robert Stern suggests the design is influenced by Adolf Loos's entry for the Chicago Tribune competition, but this seems most far-fetched. Easier to accept is the thought that the 'late Jugendstil' feeling of the detail has something to do with Hood's great friendship with Joseph Urban, the ex-Viennese stage designer and decorator. There is also a subdued whiff of Tutenkhamen about the building, conveyed more by texture and delicate entasis than by overt stylistic reference. Tutenkhamen of course was very topical at this time and inspired plenty of British architecture of the 1920s.

Most of all this finishing survives and still looks intact and crisp (Fig.26); the Tennessee Pancake people have ousted the trimmings of one doorway, but happily these have ended up in the Victoria and Albert Museum. The interesting thing about the granite is that it is polished and reflects light, so helping to give an air of impermeability, rather like faience. Terracotta and faience were just going out of fashion at this time in England, slain by a conspiracy between the Beaux-Arts advocates of Portland stone and the Lutyensesque diehards for brickwork. A bevy of Odeon cinemas helped to keep faience going into the 1930s, but the writing was on the wall for the impermeable, washable facade before Ideal House was erected. Nevertheless, Raymond Hood's black granite alternative did enjoy a brief, commercial flowering, especially in retailing. Drage's, Gordon Jeeves's vulgarization of the idea, facing Oxford Street, has already been mentioned.[20] Even closer on Oxford Street, there is the bigger 'Pantheon' Marks and Spencer and, most prominent of these West End jobs, the celebrated 'Black Odeon' in Leicester Square. The chain stores of the 1930s seem to have been specially eager to take it up, sensing the advertising psychology of a black facade. Nicholas Philpot has traced a whole set of Montague Burtons in black granite,[21] and doubtless others could be found. Almost certainly



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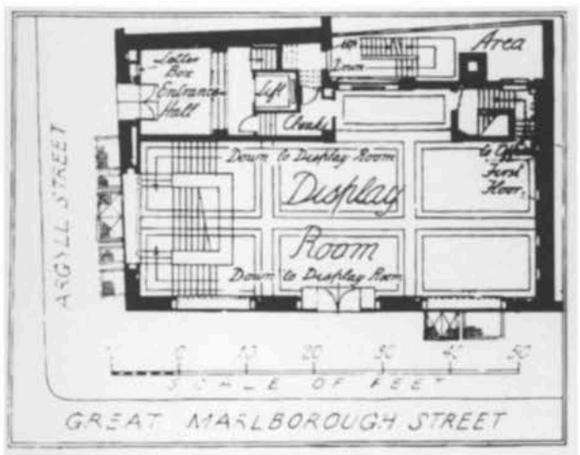


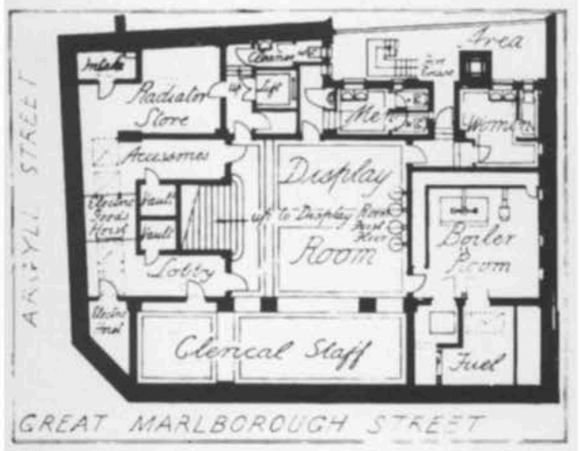


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Ideal House, London, by Raymond Hood and C. Gordon Jeeves, 1929: exterior views (22), original plan (23), showroom (24), details of cornice and main doorway showing decoration carried out by the Birmingham Guild (25,1), and photograph taken in 1972 showing (to left) the large extension added along Argyll Street by Jeeves in 1935 (26).

these can be traced back to Ideal House. But the idiom survived neither the war nor the disapprobation of the more fashionable English architects.

A postscript may help to give some sense of this disapprobation. It comes in the shape of a criticism of 'The Moor of Argyll Street' contributed to the *Architectural Review* for 1929 by Trystan Edwards, one of the several witty, backward-looking writers on British architecture of the inter-war era. Edwards had already established himself as the leading defender of Nash's Regent Street, or rather the remnants of it, against the rebuilding policies of the Crown. Ideal House was neither on Regent Street nor on Crown property, but its arrival so close by, and especially its proximity to Liberty's, that batty British mixture of classical pomp and sentimental timberwork, inspired Edwards to one of his cleverest pieces of journalism: a dialogue between Liberty's and the 'Radiator Building'. Two further neighbours, the clumsy new Dickins and Jones department store on Regent Street, backing on to Argyll Street, and the Palladium Building, a little survivor in Edwards's preferred Regency stucco slap next door to Ideal House in Great Marlborough Street (it has since been demolished), join in the fun after a little while.[22]

In honeyed accents the Tudor edifice began: 'I am perfectly delighted to see you, Radiator Building, you are a person just after my own heart. I welcome you cordially, and I think I may say not only on behalf of the pseudo-Egyptian neighbour on your right and, ahem, your dear little Regency friend on your left, that you fit in here quite beautifully. But while you harmonize so well with them it is with my own self that you have the greatest spiritual affinity.' . . .

The Radiator Building was obviously taken aback by this opening move. He might pardonably have expected to find extreme simplicity and an air of exaggerated country-cousindom in the Tudor edifice, and had, perhaps, looked forward to the opportunity of indulging in a little good-humoured sarcasm at her expense. He now realized the need for caution, for he replied: 'I am sorry, madam, but I fail to understand you. What's the game?'

'Well, don't you see,' said Liberty's, 'that our respective attitudes to our surroundings are absolutely identical? I wanted to be as different from my neighbours as possible, and you wanted to be entirely different from *your* neighbours. What closer bond could there be between us than this, for are we not both nonconformists, both apostles of individualism, both living exemplars of the latest and most entrancing fashion of architectural anarchy? I made a hit with my pretty half-timbering, made from an old battleship I might inform you, but I am not at all sure that you, with your polished black granite, are not making a greater sensation still.'

'I am much obliged to you for the compliment, I am sure,' replied the Radiator Building. 'I was determined to make a splash. You see, my theory is this. Most of the buildings in London are just mumbling, they don't know how to shout — they haven't any advertisement value. Now, what I say is that a building must have advertisement value, or else it might just as well be a stack of bricks. So many new buildings here are too dull for words. Even when they are brand new nobody looks at them, they haven't got what I call "snap". Now just take a glance at me — once seen never forgotten. But don't think I pride myself upon my knowledge of architecture,' proceeded the Radiator Building with obvious mock-modesty, 'I don't even know whether my style is good or bad, I am content not to be ignored.'

'But why be such a blackamoor?' asked the little Regency Palladium.

'That is an easy question to answer. You see, I have studied my architectural environment very carefully. If you had been black I should have been white. But as you are white I am black. How else could I have achieved advertisement value?' . . .

'But my white gleaming plaster is really the ideal covering for ferro-concrete construction, although people are too stupid to recognize this today. And look how well my windows stand out against the light-toned background of my wallage. For that reason alone it is a cardinal error to make the walls of a building black, because then the windows, which are, as it were, the eyes of a building, scarcely stand out at all, and the facade seems utterly dull and lifeless.'

'That is just where you are wrong,' said the Radiator Building. 'If my surface were a dull black, your criticism would have point, but my polished granite reflects the light. . . . And surely you must admire the delicate gold ornament which surrounds the opening of my doorways and the shop fronts on the ground-floor level. I claim that this is something quite new in architectural design, and this dainty gilding certainly required a black background to set it off to the best advantage. Moreover, the gilt ornament beneath my cornice and at the top of my attic is wonderfully chaste and represents a new departure in the external decoration of a building. And may I not claim some credit to myself for the restraint which marks the composition of my facade? Contrast me, for instance, with my right-hand neighbour, whose one ambition appears to be to subdivide his facade as much as possible, and to overload it with too great a multiplicity of architectural features, with the result that the wall surface is frittered away.'

I thought it unlikely that Dickins and Jones's building would take this lying down and, sure enough, it immediately expostulated. 'I have heard all this before from the little stucco buildings on the other side of Regent Street. It was the last thing they said before their decease. But permit me to point out, that if I err in one direction, you err in another, for the plain repetitive formation of your windows is too simple. It is quite jejune, if I may say so. Architectural design would be quite remarkably easy if all you had to do was to show rows and rows of windows all alike, as if they had come out of a machine shop. I can assure you that your tricks of black and gilt will not compensate for the over-simplicity of your window pattern.'

'Dear, dear, dear,' replied the other, 'I never thought that there would be so much argument about me. I was prepared to come, to see, and to conquer, but not to have my feathers ruffled by my next-door neighbours. But never mind, I can afford to ignore them.'

'And what is more, my dear Radiator Building,' said Liberty's, 'you *do* ignore them.'



Dickins and Jones



Radiator Building



Palladium



Liberty's

Notes

1. Frank Lloyd Wright, *Letters to Apprentices* (1982), p.86.
2. See now also Robert Stern and Thomas Catalano, *Raymond Hood* (1982).
3. *New Yorker*, 11 April 1931, pp.24-7.
4. Carol Krinsky, *Rockefeller Center* (1978), especially chapter XI. I am very grateful to Carol Krinsky for her kindness in suggesting reading and other possible sources for the American aspects of this article, and for her comments on a draft of it.
5. *New Yorker*, loc. cit.
6. *Architecture*, vol.51 (1925), p.23; see also *New Yorker*, loc. cit.
7. *Architectural Forum*, vol.62 (1935), p.131, and *New Yorker*, loc. cit.
8. I am grateful to Gavin Weightman for showing me this passage.
9. For the revitalizing effect of American competition, see S.B. Saul, 'The American Impact on British Industry 1895-1914' in *Business History*, vol.3, 1960, pp.19-38.
10. See now *Survey of London*, vol.41 (1983), pp.20-23. Selfridges has yet to be fully analysed, historically or architecturally.
11. A full account of Barkers and of Derry and Toms will appear in *Survey of London*, vol.42, to appear in 1985.
12. For Bush House, see Greater London Record Office, LCC Improvements Committee, Presented Papers vols.173 and 174, Oct. 1919-Jan. 1920, and Minutes of Proceedings, 14 Oct. 1919, p.1205, and 27 Jan. 1920, p.34; also *The Builder*, 7 Jan. 1921, pp.4, 9, 32; *The Architect and Building News*, 30 Nov. 1928, pp.689-90; *The Builder*, 30 Apr. 1954 (obituary of Corbett).
13. *Architecture*, vol.51 (1925), p.23.
14. *Architectural Forum*, vol.4 (1924), pp.89,92.
15. C.H. Reilly, *Scaffolding in the Sky* (1938), pp.112, 122-3, 216, 218-19, 224.
16. Reilly, op.cit., pp.226-31; see also *Architectural Review*, vol.61 (1927), pp.16-24.
17. *Pencil Points*, vol.9 (1928), p.269.
18. There are no drawings for Ideal House among the Gordon Jeeves drawings at the RIBA.
19. Details about the building seem sparse. It was published in *The Architect and Building News*, 14 June 1929, pp.777-84; *Architects' Journal*, 30 Jan. 1929, p.194; *The Builder*, 10 Aug. 1928, p.213 and 27 Sept. 1929, pp.508ff.; see also *Survey of London,* vol.31 (1963), p.307. See also Stern and Catalano, op.cit., p.10.
20. Drage's was published in *Architects' Journal*, 9 Jan. 1931, pp.81-5. Jeeves subsequently extended this building considerably and, as at Ideal House, rather insensitively.
21. Nicholas Philpot kindly tells me of black Montague Burtons, all apparently of c.1936-8, at Eastleigh, Reading, Mexborough, Dagenham, Stratford on Avon, Sutton Coldfield, Hayes, Wednesbury, Bournemouth, Southampton, Slough, Hull, North Finchley, Chingford, Catford and Poole.
22. *Architectural Review*, vol.65 (1929), pp.289-99.

Photographic acknowledgements

Figs.1,2,3,10: photographs by F.R. Yerbury, courtesy of AA Slide Library; Figs.4,5,7,21: from A.T. North, Raymond Hood *(1931); Fig.6: from Alfred C. Bossom,* Building to the Skies *(1934); Fig.8:* Architectural Forum, *1924; Fig.9:* Architecture *(New York), 1931; Figs.11,20:* Pencil Points, *1928; Fig.12: courtesy of Selfridges; Fig.13: exterior view and plan,* Architect and Building News, *1933, photograph of lifts courtesy of GLC; Fig.14: from Francisco Mujica,* History of the Skyscraper *(1929); Figs.15,19,26,p.42 (Liberty's, Dickins & Jones): GLC; Fig.16:* Builder, *1929; Fig.17:* Architectural Review, *1927; Fig.18: RIBA; Fig.22(left):* Architects' Journal, *1929; Figs.23,25:* Architectural Review, *1929; Fig.24:* Architect and Building News, *1929.*