



**Figure 2.11** The Quadrant,  
Regent Street, London

**Figure 2.12** Regent's Park  
Crescent, Regent Street,  
London

2.11



2.12

unable to design all of the building façades himself, as the entrepreneur putting the scheme together he was able to coordinate the various façade designs. The visual unity of the original Regent Street was ensured by the consistent use of a classical style and its execution in painted stucco, a building material often regarded as inferior to stone. Nash did, however, manage to design the critical façades that closed vistas and the important accents where the street changes direction. Bacon (1978) remarking on 'the sinuosity of Regent Street' suggests that the aesthetic quality of the street may be due to 'the superb handling of the changes in direction of the street by cylinders and flat domes of the bordering buildings'. It was at these points that Nash's skill as a decorator of the city becomes most apparent. The decorative detail and articulation of Regent Street occurred within the successive spatial episodes and, more particularly, at the junctions of those episodes so that no portion of the street was uninterrupted by square, circus or crescent for more than a few hundred metres. This decoration was rarely elaborate or complex, rather it was suitably restrained, subtly reinforcing the significant spatial qualities of the street (Figures 2.10 to 2.12).

As originally built, the processional route of Regent Street, at one end, began at Carlton House - the Prince Regent's residence. The vista southwards through Waterloo Place would originally have terminated at Carlton House demolished in 1827. The axis of Lower Regent Street now focuses on the York Column and an imposing flight of steps leading towards St James' Park, extending the route onto The Mall leading to Buckingham Palace. The initial vista northward through Waterloo Place and Piccadilly Circus was terminated by the apparently substantial presence of the County Fire Office. Even though the County Fire Office was not as substantial as it appeared, the scale of its elevation produced a convincing effect within Lower Regent Street. The junction of Lower Regent Street with Piccadilly formed the original Piccadilly Circus. To avoid the impression of crossing Piccadilly, Nash

placed identical curved buildings on each corner to give each street equal significance. However, the spatial qualities of this circus were badly distorted when Shaftesbury Avenue was cut into the circus in 1886 and little trace of the original circus remains today. From the County Fire Office, Regent Street turns sharply through ninety degrees into the majestic sweep of The Quadrant. The decorative detail here again was restrained so that little detracted from the grace of the space. The use of covered colonnaded walkways down its whole length (removed in 1848) and a uniform architectural treatment established unity and grandeur.

As at Piccadilly Circus, Nash enhanced the crossing with Oxford Street with a circus to give each street equal significance. However, the circus as rebuilt between 1913 and 1928 is weakly-defined, its spatial qualities out of proportion with the scale of the streets forming the crossing. To the north of Oxford Street, Nash was obliged, for practical reasons, to change the direction of the street to pick up the line of the earlier Portland Place. In the hands of a lesser designer this could have resulted in an awkward link. Nash resolved the problem with masterly precision: All Souls' Church with its adroitly placed circular-spired vestibule was used both as a terminal feature at this awkward junction and as an element which neatly resolves the offset of the street. The siting of the circular drum shows a fine appreciation of urban form; the church becoming a decorative urban statement and a masterpiece of civic design. Further north, Regent Street incorporates Portland Place built by the Adam Brothers. Portland Place was considered in the early eighteenth century to be the finest street in London. The broader and stately proportions of Portland Place slow the visual pace of Regent Street. To the north of Portland Place, Regent's Park Crescent and Regent's Park Square function as a powerful connection between Portland Place and Regent's Park. The semi-circular sweep of the Ionic colonnaded crescent directs the movement both out of and into Portland Place. Its decorative detail



**Figure 2.13** Arcaded Parisian street

being restrained and polite, the unadorned sweep of the space alone is sufficient, presenting a magnificent opening or coda to the street sequence.

Boulevard Haussmann, Paris, in function and in terms of its use of neo-classical elements is very similar to Regent Street. In Boulevard Haussmann major stores express their corporate identity while showing respect for the street by using materials, details, a style and scale which is in keeping with the surrounding street context (Figure 2.13). The ground level of the street accentuates horizontality with large glazed areas, facing and corners which both support and contrast with the verticality of the rest of the building façade. Colonnades and arcades are another way of decorating commercial areas. A typical example is Bologna. The central area is highly decorated by the extensive use of repetitive elements, rich detailing and the subtle use of colour (Figure 2.14).

It is, of course, possible to achieve highly decorated streets without using classical elements, as in the case of Amsterdam. The narrow frontages along the canals in Amsterdam have resulted in a