Figure 2.9 The Rajpath, New Delhi

variety of different building types, heights and massing. In Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington DC, neo-classical façades of museums and government buildings juxtaposed with modern buildings define a highly decorated street of great complexity where unity is achieved through the use of materials and the repetition of small scale cues. On a civic street such as Pennsylvania Avenue, different buildings add to the richness by expressing externally their functions. The extension of the National Gallery by I.M. Pei is such a building adding to the street its own decorative effect. The height control in Washington limits the effectiveness of the roof line as a decorative element: the street under these conditions achieves its effect without the contribution of an exciting skyline.

The Rajpath in New Delhi is another example of the monumental civic street. It is unified by Lutyens' plan; the imposition of a classical style of architecture with a strong Moghul flavour; the repetitive use of red and yellow sandstone and the employment of a fine formal landscape treatment (Figure 2.9).

The Embankment in London lines the Thames. Established in the late nineteenth century, it reinforced the tradition established by the great aristocratic houses built between the Strand and the river in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The result of this early development had been large plot sizes and the tradition of buildings with two façades, one addressing the road, the other the river. The buildings of the Embankment in the nineteenth century made the sweeping riverscape significant in a decorative sense. There is a regular massing of 'palaces' but each is different in detail, articulation and materials. The buildings use classical elements with a mainly vertical emphasis as the main decorative theme. This is a lively waterfront with an imposing presence and a decorative theme which is in keeping with the grand scale.

COMMERCIAL STREETS

Figure 2.10 Plan
of Regent Street,
London

Commercial streets because of their function, decorate the city: these are the streets where the quality of design achieved by decoration contributes to business prosperity. The life and movement of pedestrians on the pavement stimulated by the commercial activities, is itself a vital contribution to decorating the city. Commercial streets can take on the classical appearance of the Vitruvian tragic scene or the quaint medieval charm of the market town imbued with the character of the comic scene. Whichever form the commercial street takes it is the backcloth to the daily theatre of business life, the heartbeat of the city. Regent Street has decorated the central part of London for nearly two centuries. It has been, and still is, a major magnet for attracting high quality retail and ancillary services. The great pleasure that Regent Street gives the user and tourist lies in its graceful curves which, as one walks along it, present an ever changing and unfolding visual scene. However, a curving street was not John Nash's original intention (Summerson, 1935). He had envisaged a straight street linking the royal lands in the north to the important parts of London in the south, but was forced by the awkward patterns of property ownership in the intervening fashionable areas to resort to curves. Whatever its genesis, Regent Street is a spatial delight. Prior to the First World War that spatial delight would have been complemented by the architecture defining the space of the street. Alas Nash's Regent Street is now gone, lost in the insensitive redevelopment of the 1920s and 1930s when many leases fell due, and in the rebuilding after the bombing of the Second World War. The modern observer can only mentally reconstruct the experience of Nash's Regent Street. The ground plane of this street, for example, was a rich texture of granite setts in keeping with the scale of the street architecture of Nash and his contemporary designers.

Nash's Regent Street was a triumph of picturesque visual planning. Although Nash was