

Figure 2.34 Bedford Square, London



2.34

decoration is vital to the creation of a rich and interesting environment. Bland building frontages

without interest can be relieved by good floorscaping, the placing of fine street ornaments and by landscaping but these features can never be a complete compensation. The richness of the medieval and early Renaissance city in Italy is dependent as much on a highly decorative architecture as it is upon the wonderful urban spaces to be found in those cities. There must, however, be a rationale for the decorative design of urban façades. This rationale, it is argued here, is developed from an understanding of the way in which we look at buildings and from the best traditions of urban decoration. That is, from periods in the past when designers interpreted instinctively the principles of perception and produced great cities such as Venice and Florence. The two main components of the city where façade treatment is particularly important are the street and the square. While these two elements share many of the principles that determine the appropriate location of ornament there are important differences which derive from their different roles as path and node.

THE CORNER

3

INTRODUCTION

The design of the corner where two planes meet is a visual problem giving scope for expression in the design of almost any artefact, the design of the urban scene is no exception to this rule. Indeed, the handling of the corner is often an indication of the quality and mastery of the designer. To recognize the importance of a corner site and give it significance is to enrich the visual environment and the urban townscape. The corner, because of its significance, has often been an important element on which to bestow formal ornament or more personalized decoration: this, however, has not always been so. During the early period of modern architecture corner treatment was stark and unadorned. There have, however, been other times when the corner was not celebrated: many fine Georgian buildings in Britain, for example, presented the transition of planes at the corners of buildings simply with quoin details in materials which differed from those of the general façade (Figure 3.1).

While the question of embellishment of corner details is a matter of style, it is nevertheless possible to distinguish two generic types of corner: the 'internal corner' where two planes meet and tend to



Figure 3.1 Quoined corner, Regent Street, Nottingham