

Room for Diplomacy

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Mark Bertram

with a Foreword by
Lord Hurd of Westwell

Spire Books Ltd

PO Box 2336, Reading RG4 5WJ

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CIP data: a catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Designed by John Elliott

ISBN 978-1-904965-32-9

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The price of presence: the Royal Standard flying at the Moscow embassy during HRH The Duke of Gloucester's visit in 1986.

Foreword

BY THE RT HON LORD HURD OF WESTWELL CH CBE

In my first foreign posting in 1954 I lived in one of the bungalows which the Boxers besieged during their attack on Peking in 1900. In my last posting in Rome my office looked along the aqueduct in the garden of the Villa Volkonsky which we had taken from the Germans by way of reparation at the end of World War II.

Neither of these buildings now serves the purpose which I remember. Mark Bertram's fascinating account of the British diplomatic estate overseas underlines the many changes of need and fashion which guided those responsible for its upkeep and administration. In days of plenty the accent might be on emphasising the best in British architecture, as illustrated for example by the work of Lutyens in Washington. At other times we were emphasising our Imperial strength, as in Peking and indeed Kabul. More often however the accent has been, as of now, on the need to keep costs under control. The Treasury has never sympathised with the argument that Britain's diplomats need to keep up a certain style if they are to do their job properly. As Mark Bertram shows, the buildings in which they live reflect the anxieties or ambitions of each decade. On the whole he believes that those responsible did a good job – but the struggle and the arguments continue.

Douglas Hurd.

For
all my colleagues and our predecessors,
most of whose names this book is too short to include,
who worked hard and long, sometimes in extraordinary circumstances,
buying and selling, designing and building, maintaining and furnishing
diplomatic and consular buildings.

Preface

It struck me as odd, throughout my long involvement with Britain's diplomatic buildings overseas, that so little information was available about their history, either collectively or individually. Between consulting dry registers for a few hard facts and absorbing diplomatic anecdotes for questionable impressions, there was little information available, and none readily so. I resolved quite a few years ago to try and fill the gap, and this book is the result.

Since the 1870s, when the British government first became fully engaged in the search for suitable accommodation overseas, and still today, each property acquired was the best compromise thought to be achievable at the time between three competing considerations: what function was to be housed, what property was available, and what was affordable. None of these was precisely identifiable. Functionality depended on perceived future operational requirements. Availability was confined to four options, sometimes in combination: a building that could be bought and adapted, a site that could be acquired and built upon, a property that the host country might be persuaded to grant, and a property that could be leased for whatever term of years. Affordability depended on the Treasury's assessment or whim in the prevailing financial climate. With all these variables, it is not surprising that Britain's diplomatic buildings are a mixture of old and new, large and small, grand and humble: each is the chosen compromise in a unique set of circumstances. How long each remains in the diplomatic estate is one of the best measures of its success.

The story of these buildings needs to be told primarily in the institutional terms of the Foreign Office which needed them, the succession of Works departments which provided them, the Treasury which paid for them, and Parliament which kept an eye on their general suitability or otherwise. These institutions had relatively static outlooks towards the buildings: the

Foreign Office sought to keep up with, or ahead of, the standards of rival countries; the Office of Works was suspicious about the Foreign Office's requirements; the Treasury was sure that all buildings were more expensive than necessary; and Parliament was frustrated that it did not have more direct control. Within these relatively static institutional outlooks, of course, were the varied and changeable views of individual office-holders, each with their own job to do and their own opinions. The resulting patchwork of relations between, for example, London and abroad, diplomats and estate managers, ambassadors and architects, incumbent heads of mission and their successors, has always been a rich one.

Diplomatic buildings had a cachet from the outset by virtue of their location, size, emblems and the allure of being invited within. Nevertheless, the Office of Works regarded them as an unwelcome burden and treated them little differently from the general run of its civil projects in the UK. It was not until the 1920s that serious attention was paid to the actual architecture of diplomatic buildings. Nor until the 1950s that new buildings began to be considered as architectural opportunities for reflecting and projecting British national aspirations. The advent of looking for embassies to be national architectural icons is even more recent.

While some institutional and personal outlooks have changed surprisingly little over the last 200 years, the world, of course, has changed almost out of recognition. There are more than ten times as many countries enjoying diplomatic relations now than there were in 1800, a thousand times as many diplomats posted around the world, all able to communicate with their home governments in a millionth of the time. It is perhaps a surprise that diplomatic accommodation remains a necessary commodity at all and that forecasts of its extensive redundancy have proved wrong. Looming present-day cutbacks may force the pace towards fewer and smaller diplomatic buildings. If so, some of those in this book may find new lives in new uses. They would not be the first. The consulate at Amoy, for example, is now Xiamen's coin museum, the residence in Rio de Janeiro is the headquarters of the city's Municipality, and the consulates in Fez and Zomba are parts of hotels. In Shanghai, the former consular supreme court is now a smart restaurant managed by the new Peninsula Hotel next door and the consul-general's residence is about to become an expensive retail outlet: times change.

It was my original intention that this book should include a catalogue giving more details about the buildings mentioned here, as well as about those that I have excluded. Space, however, dictated otherwise and the catalogue will instead appear as a sister volume, currently in preparation.

Acknowledgements

This book has been more enjoyable, and taken much longer, to piece together and write than I expected. My first acknowledgment and my deepest gratitude is to my wife Vanessa for her patience and support, for doing lots of things that I should have done, or at least helped with, and for her resilient computer and image-handling skills. Many of my family, friends and colleagues have been consistently polite in enquiring about my progress with this book while plainly wondering why anything should take quite so long. I am grateful to all of them for their forbearance, and especially those who have additionally and kindly fed me, put me up, and buoyed me up.

This book has grown out of my working career and my thanks therefore extend beyond those who have helped me directly with it to those who were so good to me over an even longer period. I will restrict myself to mentioning only two. To Sir Roger Carrick I owe the most: he taught me to understand the Foreign Office in 1983 and has been unfailingly supportive and kind ever since. And Sir Curtis Keeble, who died in 2009, who ran him close for wisdom and wit, as well as patience in introducing this naive architect to what both would call the 'real world'.

The FCO, and particularly Sir Peter Ricketts and Professor Patrick Salmon, has encouraged me in this venture and given me plentiful access to material, some of which it did not know it had. Numerous others have given me help, advice, sources and ideas during the preparation of this book. They include Hugh Arbuthnott, Richard Burton, Sherban Cantacuzino, Sophie Carter, Roy Coombs, Andy Cornell, Alfred Coutts, Jane Crawley, Kate Crowe, Jim Daly, Stephen Day, Sarah Doig, Sir Simon Gass, Geoff Gillham, Alasdair Glass, Keith Hamilton, Peter Harris, Lady Ruth Hawley, Grant Hibberd, Ron Hills, Jim Hoare, Michael Holmes, Edwin Keates, Clive

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Lacey, Sir Michael Llewellyn Smith, Jeremy Melvin, Richard Muir, Jeremy Neate, John Owen, Malcolm Reading, Steven Richmond, Derek Savage, Ann Snow, Dame Veronica Sutherland, Francis Walley, Stephen Whittle, Mark Willingale, Sir Andrew Wood, and Tristram Woolston. I am grateful to them all.

A splendid revelation to me has been the endless willingness of library staff to engage in esoteric pursuits. I cannot praise The National Archives too highly for its efficient and painstaking approach to every enquiry and service. For much the same reason, I have relished the time I have spent in the libraries of the Athenaeum, Cambridge University, the Royal Engineers at Chatham, and the Royal Institute of British Architects, and I extend thanks to them all.

I am most grateful to Lord Hurd for his Foreword, for there is nobody with greater experience of the diplomatic estate and the job it has to do, nor from such a variety of viewpoints as diplomat, Minister of State, and Foreign Secretary. Geoff Brandwood, John Elliott and Linda Hone at Spire Books have brought this book to fruition with enthusiasm and energy: I am immensely grateful to them.

Crown copyright material appears by courtesy of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office at The National Archives. The credits for the illustrations, listed at the end of the book, make clear by whose kind courtesy each appears, and I thank those individuals and organisations. Finally, I should say that the views expressed in this book are my own and do not represent those of Her Majesty's Government.

Notes on Nomenclature

I should explain a few conventions and short cuts that I have adopted in the interests of simplicity and readability.

Departments in London

The Foreign Office lasted from 1782 until it became the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in 1968, after which I have called it the FCO. The Office of Works lasted until 1941: I have avoided, except in quotations, the frequent alternative title of Board of Works. The Office of Works became the Ministry of Works in 1941 and I have called it that until 1972 (although there were variants during the mid-1940s and the 1960s) when it became the Property Services Agency, which I have called the PSA.

Diplomatic and Foreign Office terms

An embassy was originally the ambassador and his entourage, and they lived in an embassy house. In the same house was the chancery, where the ambassador's official staff worked. Slightly less important than an embassy, a legation was a minister and his entourage, living in a legation house. Both were missions, which is why the buildings were sometimes called mission houses. Legations became extinct in the 1950s with the result that diplomatic representation in a capital city was afterwards invariably an embassy, however small. As missions took on wider responsibilities, the expansion of offices led in the 1930s to their being housed separately from the mission house in a building called the embassy offices, soon shortened to embassy and thereby supplanting the original meaning of the word. The mission house, once the offices had moved out of it, came to be known as the head of mission's residence.

Consulates were a simpler matter: they retained a separate identity and consuls occupied separate premises from diplomats until after the First

NOTES ON NOMENCLATURE

World War. High commissions are, from most points of view, embassies in Commonwealth countries. The generic term for any British representation overseas, whether embassy, high commission or consulate, is a Post. There are two other peculiarities worth noting. The Foreign Office's 'chief clerk' matured from a quill-pusher in 1800 to the equivalent of a director of corporate affairs nearly 200 years later without his name being changed. And 'ingoings' are the adaptations made to a newly acquired building to turn it into a workable diplomatic building.

Cities

Where a city has been re-named, I have adopted the changed name after the date of change: Constantinople therefore becomes Istanbul after 1930. Likewise where spelling or transliteration conventions have changed, except in the case of the Chinese consulates which remain in the nineteenth-century 'Post Office' romanisation system, like Amoy, as being more recognisable to most readers than the current *pinyin* romanisation, Xiamen.

Measures, dates, currencies and costs

I have converted all measures to either imperial or metric so as to assist the reader to grasp the size, for example, of a plot of land in Hungary that was recorded in square fathoms or of a piece of Shanghai that was '2 mow 2 fun 7 le and 2 haou' in extent. I have not converted imperial and metric measures to each other. Only two key conversions need bearing in mind here: there are about 10 square feet to a square metre and about 2.5 acres to a hectare. All dates are converted to the Gregorian calendar so as to avoid confusion about when the 4th moon of the 493rd year of the Chao Hsien Dynasty might have occurred. Where only one date is given for a building, that is the date of its completion or occupation.

All currencies are converted to pounds sterling at the rate prevailing at the time of a transaction, to avoid the uncertainties of silver ingots, napoleons and Mexican dollars. This creates a risk, since many of the costs of older projects appear so small, of assuming that the Treasury was being unreasonably churlish in objecting to their expenditure. I had hoped to give a better idea of the scale of these projects by giving revaluations in 2010 cost terms but could find no method of doing so that was not as misleading in a different way.

1

First Ownerships 1800-1815

Diplomatic background before 1815

Modern diplomatic relations between countries have been evolving since the city states of Venice, Florence, Naples and the Vatican were competing for power in the fifteenth century. Their rulers communicated with each other by sending and receiving ambassadors. During the sixteenth century there was so much traffic of ambassadors between the states that the rulers found it preferable to post a single ambassador permanently in one another's capitals. Thus the concept of the resident embassy was born. An ambassador, appointed to serve for two years in a foreign place, would be briefed by his ruler on the business that he wanted transacted and the reports, or despatches, that he wanted to receive, particularly about political intelligence that the ambassador had garnered.

The first English ambassador resident abroad was John Shirwood at Rome in 1479, and the first to a secular court was John Stile at Madrid in 1509. By the end of the sixteenth century, resident embassies had become the normal channel through which major European states conducted their international relations with each other and with the Ottoman Empire in Constantinople. Besides Rome and Madrid, England had resident ambassadors at that time at Constantinople, Paris, Vienna and Venice. An ambassador was the personal representative of his sovereign, who gave him a credential letter to present to the sovereign at whose court he was to reside. Resident embassies were generally reciprocal: hence the exchange of ambassadors signifies the establishment of diplomatic relations and their withdrawal signifies a break in them.

CHAPTER 1

As the number of resident ambassadors in a capital increased, questions inevitably arose about precedence among them and the countries that they represented. This conundrum was eventually resolved in 1815 by the Regulation of Vienna which required precedence among ambassadors to be determined solely by reference to the length of time that each had resided in that capital and without any reference to the power of his country. Other hierarchical questions of ceremony, the elaboration of entertainment and the grandeur of an ambassador's residence could not be so neatly resolved. The result was often competitive ostentation between diplomatic missions to establish superiority and to impress the host state. Resident embassies therefore became expensive enterprises. So expensive that, during the eighteenth century, a hierarchy of more economical resident diplomatic missions emerged. Ambassadors continued to head the most important missions but envoys, ministers, residents and agents headed progressively less important missions.

This hierarchy was formally codified by the Regulation of Vienna and by amendments agreed a few years later. To distinguish between resident ambassadors and ambassadors visiting on special missions, the former were called ambassadors 'extraordinaire' (French having become the language of diplomacy), and this rank alone had the right to seek audience of the host sovereign. The appellation 'plenipotentiary' was included in the title of diplomats if they had full powers to negotiate on behalf of their sovereign. All British ambassadors had these powers, hence their usual full title of 'ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary'. Below ambassadors came a tier that combined several previous ranks, including legate, that was called 'envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary', or minister for short. As Sir Humphrey Trevelyan summarised it, 'the nice gradation of ... the extraordinary and plenipotentiary at the top and the ordinary and impotent at the bottom'.¹

The mission that an ambassador headed was an embassy, the collective noun for himself and his entourage, and a minister headed a legation. At the time that the regulations were drawn up, Britain had only a handful of ambassadors and nearly 20 ministers, practically all in Europe. The building in which an ambassador or minister lived and worked was called the embassy house or the legation house: he worked in his study in the main part of the house and his diplomatic staff, if any, worked in a room, called the chancery, tucked away elsewhere in the house. Appropriation of the words 'embassy' and 'legation' to describe the building in which the mission was housed, rather the mission itself, hardly occurred before the twentieth century.

British diplomats, whatever their rank or posting, were appointed under

systems of patronage. The sovereign's patronage gradually gave way to political patronage, with the increased risk that a senior diplomat would be replaced upon a change of governing party in London. Members of Parliament were allowed to accept diplomatic appointments without resigning their seats. Given that, in the nineteenth century, a senior ambassadorship was regarded as being on a par with membership of the cabinet, Members of Parliament kept a keen eye on these opportunities. Others were reluctant ambassadors who only accepted resident roles overseas in the hope of later securing a better job at home. Diplomats were drawn principally from the aristocracy and the landed gentry: only they could afford sufficiently to supplement their official salary to run a mission that would command the attention and respect of the court to which they were accredited. The head of mission was entirely responsible for housing his mission. He invariably leased one of the grandest houses that he could afford from a noble family in the host capital and paid the rent from an allowance within his salary. The sovereign, and later the British government, did no more than provide him with a large quantity of silver, and sometimes gilt, plate (i.e. tableware); a large bible, an altar cloth and some furniture for an embassy chapel; and a royal coat of arms to install above the door.²

The diplomatic corps, which comprised all serving British diplomats, was informally structured and loosely managed. The resident mission was its basic structural unit. The head of mission, whether ambassador or minister, was for a long time alone in being formally appointed and paid. Later, the government posted an official secretary to each mission, and in due course paid his salary. The secretary's main role was to act as *chargé d'affaires* during the head of mission's absences: between these times he had little, if anything, to do. All other members of a mission's staff, like *attachés*, private secretaries, interpreters, *protégés* and servants were selected and paid by the head of mission. Together with his family, friends and relations, private household and retainers, and a chaplain, an ambassador might take to his post a party of twenty or more people. Most *attachés* did simple chores in the chancery in return for the hospitality given them by their head of mission, although a few of them became officially paid after 1815. The secretaries and *attachés* often lived in the mission house: even if they lodged elsewhere, many a head of mission insisted that his staff should lunch and dine at his table. The mission therefore operated much like an extended family. At the end of a head of mission's posting, everybody except the secretary, and everything except the archives, would move on to his next post or back to Britain, and his successor would start all over again.

The first permanent embassy houses – Constantinople, Tehran and Paris

Ambassadors and ministers rented their own mission houses. Throughout the eighteenth century, successive British ambassadors to the Ottoman Empire rented the same house in Constantinople from the Timoni family near the top of the hill in Pera, an aristocratic suburb on the north side of the Golden Horn. By 1799, when Thomas Bruce, seventh Earl of Elgin, arrived as ambassador, this house was too decrepit to be habitable. Elgin was fortunate in being able to lodge for his first two years in the empty French embassy house but was obliged to move out when the French mission returned at the end of 1801. Elgin lamented that he had then had to move ‘to a wretched house the habitation of M. Pisani [the embassy’s chief dragoman/interpreter]. It is far from sufficient to contain all my family, several of whom are distributed in other buildings, a circumstance of great danger, and inconvenience’.³ Elgin therefore set about procuring a suitable embassy house for the future. His efforts led to the British government’s first purpose-built diplomatic building, and to transforming the way that senior British diplomats would be housed.

With Anglo-Ottoman relations in an excellent state after the defeat of the French at the Battle of the Nile in 1798 and their subsequent expulsion from Egypt, Sultan Selim III offered to present a site to King George III and to build on it a fitting permanent house for the British ambassador. He therefore bought and handed over to Elgin the decrepit old Timoni house and land that the embassy had formerly occupied for a century. Elgin had two reservations about the Sultan’s offer: the site was not large enough to protect a future house on it from the spread of a neighbourhood fire, and the Turks lacked the skills to build on it an embassy house of the type and quality that he thought fitting. The Sultan’s response was to offer Elgin a handsome sum of money with which both to enlarge the site and to build on it a house according to Elgin’s own ideas of how it should be. Thus challenged, Elgin sketched out the design of a building based on what the neoclassical architect Thomas Harrison had recently built for him at the Elgin family seat at Broomhall, in Fife. He then entrusted detailed design work on it to a Roman architectural draughtsman, Balestra, whom he was employing in Athens in connection with his project for the ‘rescue’ of the antiquities.

Elgin described the Sultan’s offer to the Foreign Secretary, Lord Hawkesbury, and explained the need for a ‘fixed establishment’, or permanent home, in a country ‘where personal violence is almost unrestrained, epidemical diseases are prevalent, ministerial Houses (which are respected) certainly ought to be so capacious as to afford an asylum, and to comprehend all the persons

requisite for the public business or the minister's private service. All other foreign missions have accordingly fixed habitations here...'.⁴ Elgin had heard, indeed, that the lack of a suitable house in Constantinople had led to worthy candidates declining offers of appointment as British ambassador to the Sublime Porte, as the Grand Vizier's headquarters were referred to. Elgin seems neither to have sent any drawings to Hawkesbury nor to have received any reply: he pressed on with the project.

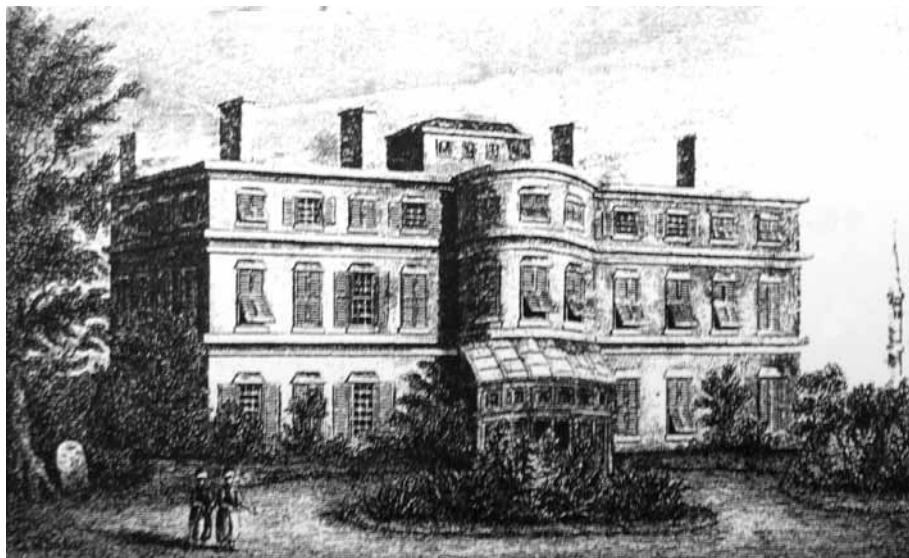
In a long despatch in November 1801, Elgin made far-sighted practical recommendations to ensure that the new palace, as it was now described, would be well managed and a success for future embassies. The British government, he argued, as owner of the land and house, should allot an annual sum for its upkeep and repairs. Rather than each ambassador providing all of his own equipment, as was then the requirement, certain items should be appropriated to the embassy: Elgin suggested that the government should buy and send out good and substantial furniture, including for the chapel, as well as a service of plate, royal pictures and a set of full liveries. And he argued that the government should also buy a summer residence to enable the ambassador and his staff to escape from the heat of Pera to the relative cool of the Bosphorus shore for the hot months. It so happened that the house he had leased the previous summer was on the market and he recommended its purchase. 'In fact My Lord, this has appeared to me so obviously essential, that understanding the house was on the point of being sold, I have individually given a commission to secure it. But of course Government is not on that account under any obligation to stand by my bargain'.⁵ And nor did it.

By January 1802, Balestra had advanced the designs for the new palace, the old Timoni buildings on the site were being demolished and materials for the new house collected. Elgin submitted to London a long and varied list of items to be procured from England. It included mahogany dining tables 'of a full breadth' for 80 people, with 80 mahogany chairs with dark blue leather seats and brass nails; 24 handsome gilt armchairs with red damask or velvet to suit the throne in the audience chamber; mirrors and chandeliers; locks and hinges on good and sound principles for 150 doors; Wilton carpets; water closets; an iron balustrade of a light pattern for a balcony of 200 feet to extend all along the garden front; and four tons of nails. The foundation stone was laid on 18 January 1802 at a ceremony with a huge Turkish official attendance. Elgin reported the Captain Pasha, admiral of the fleet, as saying 'that it was not in the power of language to convey an adequate idea of the obligations Great Britain had rendered to Turkey', and then releasing from their chains all of his 150 or so Maltese slaves, some of

whom had been held for 50 years, and handed them to British protection.⁶

The shell and roof of the large new building were nearly complete when Elgin left Constantinople in January 1803. But construction and financial problems, disquiet in London about profligacy, and a year-long suspension of Anglo-Ottoman diplomatic relations caused so many delays that the palace was not completed until 1808 (**Fig. 1.1**). The Reverend Robert Walsh, chaplain to the embassy, described the house in the 1820s.

The palace stands nearly in the center of a demesne, including a lawn and garden of about four acres, enclosed from the streets by a high and substantial wall. It is an oblong quadrangular building of three stories, surmounted on the roof by a lofty kiosk, or square cupola, which commands a most extensive view of the Bosphorus, Sea of Marmora, Constantinople, and the surrounding country. It also gave light to a large hall below, which occupied the center of the building, and round which the apartments were situated. One of them is the grand hall, or reception-room. At the end stands the throne, as the representative of majesty, which no one occupied, till the arrival of the unfortunate Queen Caroline [at the time of her visit, the exiled Princess of Wales], who, in her Oriental wanderings, had visited Constantinople. During her short sojourn she visited the room every day, and, as an old domestic informed me, was frequently seen weeping, with her head resting on her hands, sitting on the steps of this throne.⁷



1.1. The ‘English palace’ at Pera, started by the seventh Earl of Elgin in 1801 to a design that he based on his Scottish home.

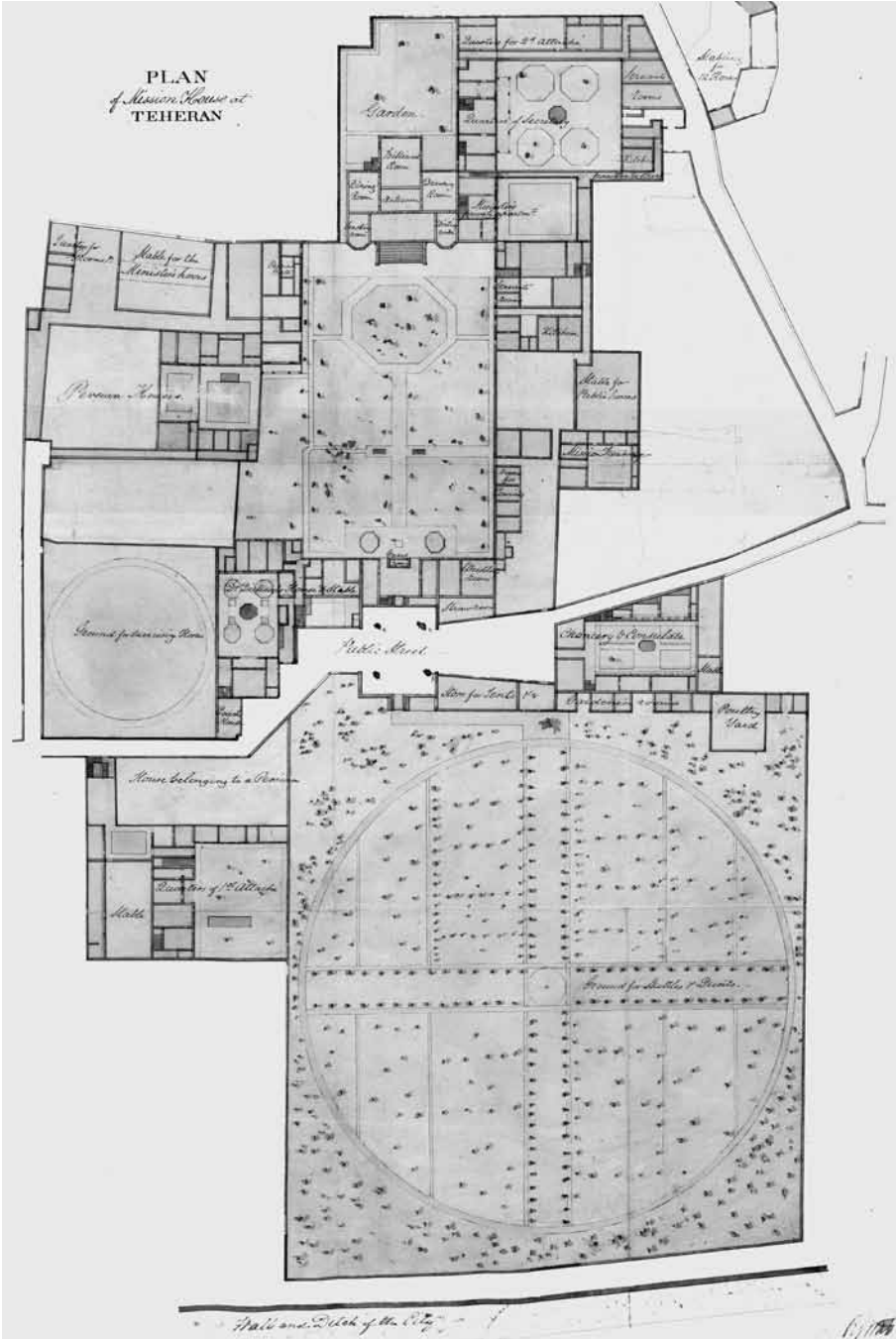
Elgin's English palace was thus the first diplomatic building overseas to be owned by the British government. Although three times extensively rebuilt as a result of fires, the house remains in use as the British consulate-general in Istanbul.

The second building to come into the government's ownership, again through construction, was at Tehran. Unlike Elgin, who went to Constantinople as one of a long succession of resident British ambassadors, Sir Gore Ouseley was the first resident ambassador to be appointed to Persia in 1811. And, unlike Elgin's palace which took eight years to complete, Ouseley was able to move into his new house within a couple of years of his arrival. He had the advantage of taking with him to Tehran the Foreign Office's authority to obtain a grant of land from the Shah and to spend £8,000 on building and furnishing an embassy house. This arrangement seems likely to have owed its simplicity and generosity to the support of Charles Arbuthnot, who had spent the years 1805-7 as ambassador in Constantinople battling to complete Elgin's palace and being forced to dig deep into his own fortune to do so. Arbuthnot was now joint secretary to the Treasury and in a position to help others avoid the financial penalty he had suffered. The Shah duly stripped one of his generals of his land and presented it to Ouseley. It lay just south of the main bazaar and became known as the *Bāgh-I Ilchī*, Garden of the Ambassador. The area is still sometimes called that today.

The scholarly Ouseley was his own architect, and had previous experience. Ten years earlier, as a major serving in India, he had designed for the Wazir of Oudh the Dilkushā palace at Lucknow, modelling it on Vanbrugh's Seaton Delaval in Northumberland. The site in Tehran was awkwardly shaped, hemmed in by mud houses and bisected by a public street but Ouseley managed, with simplicity and elegance, to lay out an axis that controlled the siting of his tall single-storey house, and a number of ancillary buildings, courts and gardens (**Fig. 1.2**). The house itself was approached through an entrance building, across a rectangular grassed court, and up a wide, shallow flight of steps on to a terrace with a classical portico supported on six slim columns. The new house was clearly designed to project the authority of His Majesty's ambassador. Its strong appearance and formal plan arrangement contrasted sharply with the muddle and mud of the surrounding native area. Over time, some of the huddles of adjacent buildings were bought direct from their owners and converted for chancery and consulate, quarters for attachés, and stabling.

Ouseley and his staff moved into the completed embassy house in December 1813. It was the first house that any foreign mission had been allowed to build in Persia and it drew admiring remarks from the outset.

CHAPTER 1

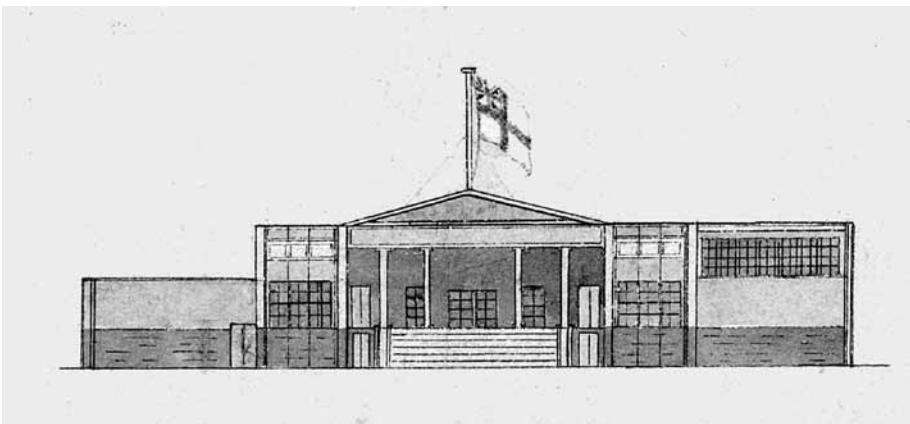


1.2. Site plan of the legation buildings at Tehran, surveyed by a Monsieur Bovagnet in 1860. Sir Gore Ouseley's original embassy house is at the top, with formal rooms grouped round a large terrace, and private quarters in the adjacent courtyard building. A public street bisected the site.

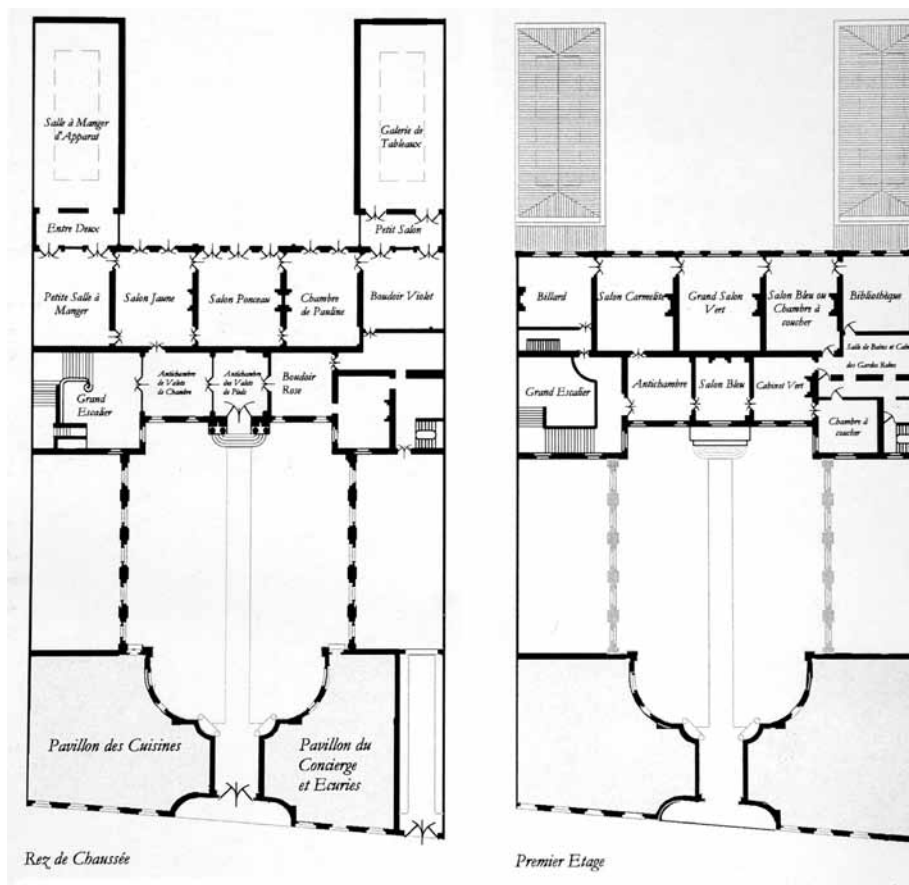
James Morier, the official Secretary of embassy, wrote four days after moving in ‘The house, with its white columns and its clean, tall facade glitters more brightly than any other building in Tehran ... it stands out among the mud houses of rascals and fishwives which surround it’⁸ (**Fig. 1.3**). Ouseley described the impact of his entertaining style on his first Persian ministerial guests ‘my display of chandeliers and lustres with spermaceti candles, and my fine plate quite astonished them – but a good English grate and a rousing fire seemed to claim almost equal admiration’.⁹ Ouseley left Tehran in the following year: none of his successors until 1944 carried the ambassadorial rank that he had held, but he bestowed a fine legation house on them that lasted, just, for the next 50 years.

In Paris, resident ambassadors had rented their own embassy houses for a couple of centuries before Arthur Wellesley, newly created first Duke of Wellington, arrived as ambassador in August 1814 and walked straight into the first embassy house to be bought by the British government. Wellington had seen several houses in Paris in June, of which he liked best, but thought was probably too large, 39 rue du Faubourg St Honoré, which Quentin Craufurd, a wealthy dilettante Scot who lived in Paris, had taken him to see. It belonged to Napoleon’s youngest sister, Pauline Borghese, who had put it on the market because she doubted that the restored Bourbons would honour their promise to let the Bonapartes keep their property. While briefly in London in July, Wellington had arranged in principle for the British government to buy a permanent home in Paris for the embassy. Charles Arbuthnot, still at the Treasury and a close friend of the Duke, almost certainly assisted in this arrangement, as he had for Tehran.

Wellington left it to Sir Charles Stuart, the minister in Paris, to decide



1.3. Front elevation of the Tehran mission house, sketched by Bovagnet in 1860.



1.4. Ground and first floor plans of the Paris embassy house, bought from Pauline Borghese in 1814, with room names at that time. The site has an average width of 35 metres and is nearly 200 metres long. (North is to the bottom.)

which house the government should buy. Stuart, like Wellington, favoured Pauline’s house and appointed Quentin Craufurd to negotiate its purchase. Craufurd and Stuart were both connoisseurs and collectors and it was their recommendation that led to the inclusion in the sale of many of the house’s contents. Pauline was at the time in Naples, on the way to joining her brother on Elba, and relied on her Intendant General, J-PL Michelot, to negotiate for her. She wanted a million francs for the house, its contents and the stables round the corner on Rue d’Anjou, but was in a poor bargaining position. Craufurd negotiated Michelot down to 861,000 francs (about £46,500 at the time) and the principals accepted that figure. The deal was sufficiently done for Wellington to move into the house on the day of his arrival in Paris on 22 August 1814 and was finalised on 24 October. The purchase,

which was made in several instalments, was funded by the King's civil list and Wellington received the Prince Regent's 'gracious approbation of the terms of the contract with which you have entered in H.R.H. name'.¹⁰ It was a splendid purchase and the house remains to this day one of the jewels in the crown of Britain's diplomatic buildings overseas.

The house was almost 100 years old at the time of its purchase. By the 1720s, the rue du Faubourg Saint Honoré had become one of the most desirable streets in Paris and some of the finest *hôtels particuliers* to emerge from the Regency period were rising along it. The Charost family built no. 39 between 1722 and 1725. Their architect, Jean Antoine Mazin, was relatively new to fashionable house building but what he may have lacked in spatial ingenuity he made up for in more solid construction than most of his peers. Even so, the Hôtel de Charost must have been in a sorry state when Pauline Borghese, just re-married and short of funds, bought it with borrowed money for 300,000 francs from the duchesse de Charost in 1803. With the aid of fashionable architects, Pauline transformed the appearance of the house through new decorations, introducing the deep hues of the Napoleonic era, and furniture commissioned from leading designers and craftsmen.

With the proclamation of the First Empire in 1804, Pauline became an Imperial Princess and her house an official royal residence. In 1809, Napoleon paid off her debts and settled a substantial income on her. She could now afford to commission the architect P-N. Bénard to enlarge her apartment on the ground floor by building two wings projecting into the garden, the eastern for a dining room to seat 60 people and the western for a picture gallery in which she hung 175 paintings from her Borghese husband's collection in Rome. (He, when in Paris, was confined to the lesser of the two first-floor apartments.) Pauline herself lived comparatively little in the house and she never saw it again after she left Paris in June 1812 (**Fig. 1.4**).

Wellington only lived in the house for five months, during which he used it royally. He left in January 1815 as British Plenipotentiary to the Congress of Vienna and in March, after Napoleon landed back in France, went to Brussels to assemble an allied army. The embassy house was put into the care of the bankers, Perregaux. The battle of Waterloo was in June; Stuart returned to Paris as ambassador and re-opened the house in July; Napoleon went into exile in August; and Wellington became Commander-in-Chief of the Army of Occupation in October. For the three years of this appointment, he lived close to the Hôtel de Charost in the house that is now the American embassy. He then returned to politics in England.

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