



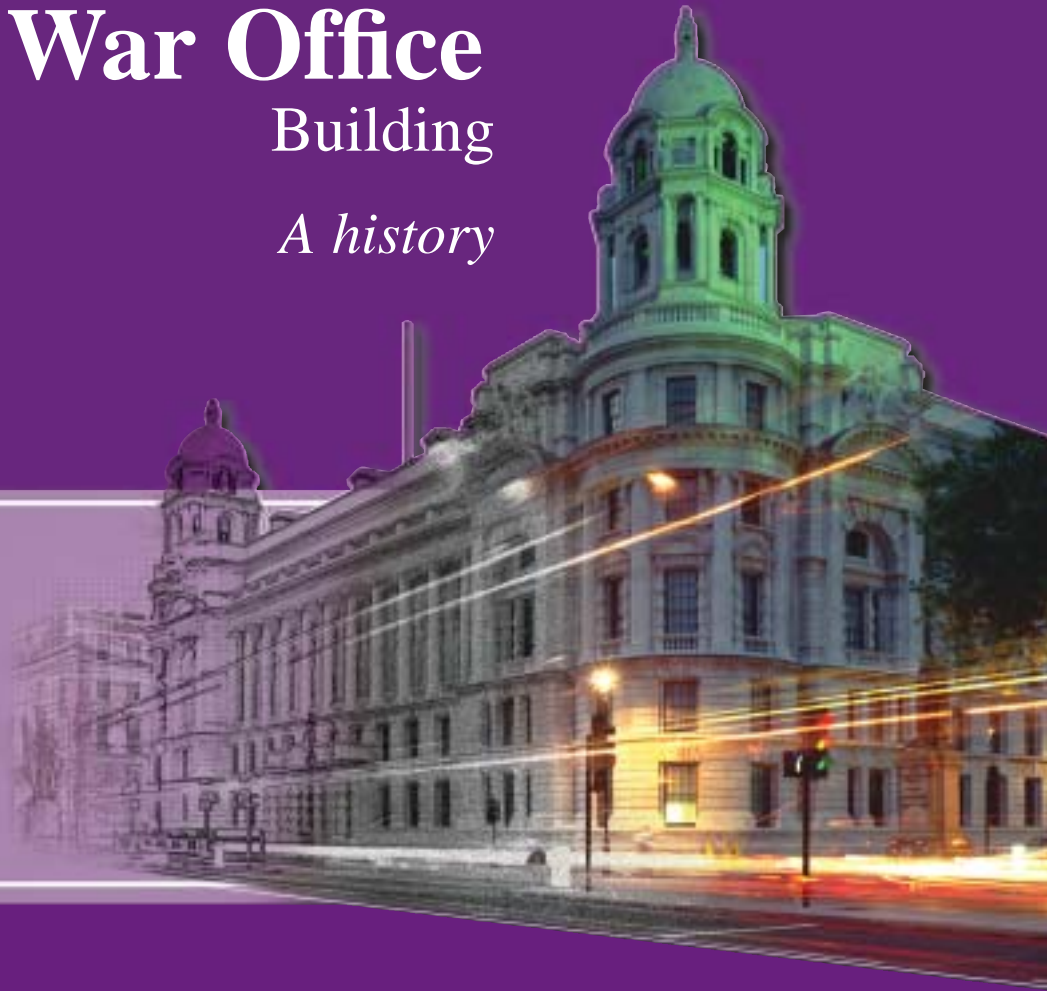
MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

The Old

War Office

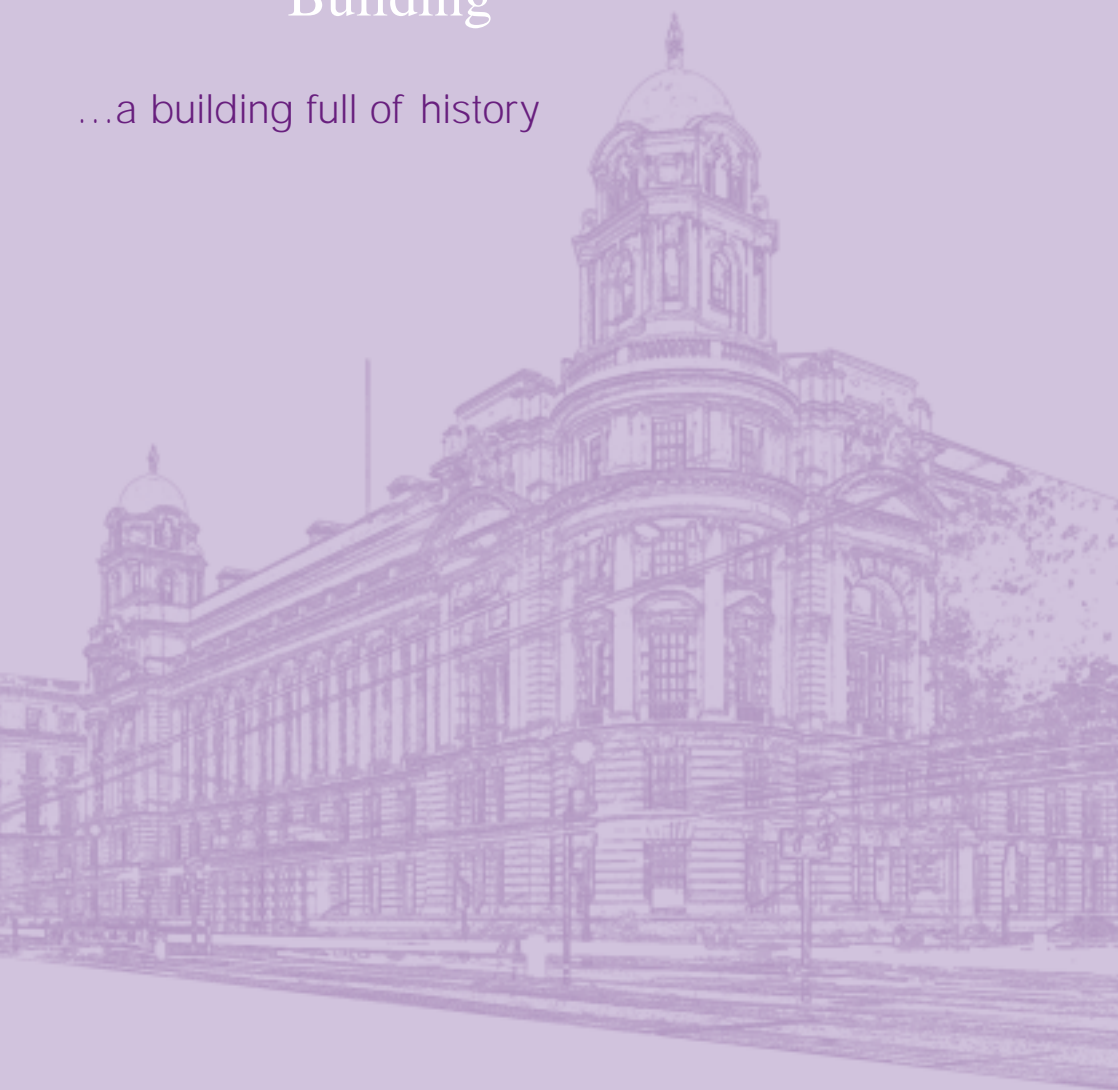
Building

A history



The Old
War Office
Building

...a building full of history



Foreword by the Rt. Hon Geoff Hoon MP, Secretary of State for Defence



The Old War Office Building has been a Whitehall landmark for nearly a century. No-one can fail to be impressed by its imposing Edwardian Baroque exterior and splendidly restored rooms and stairways.

With the long-overdue modernisation of the MOD Main Building, Defence Ministers and other members of the Defence Council – the Department's senior committee – have moved temporarily to the Old War Office. To mark the occasion I have asked for this short booklet, describing the history of the Old War Office Building, to be published. The booklet also includes a brief history of the site on which the building now stands, and of other historic MOD headquarters buildings in Central London.

People know about the work that our Armed Forces do around the world as a force for good. Less well known is the work that we do to preserve our heritage and to look after the historic buildings that we occupy. I hope that this publication will help to raise awareness of that.

The Old War Office Building has had a fascinating past, as you will see. People working within its walls played a key role in two World Wars and in the Cold War that followed. The building is full of history. Lawrence of Arabia once worked here. I am now occupying the office which Churchill, Lloyd-George and Profumo once had.

I hope that you will find this publication, and the insight it gives into the building and the work done there – both past and present – an interesting read.

Geoffrey Hoon

*A decorative dome
atops each of the four
corner towers of the
Old War Office Building*



The location

A history of the Old War Office Building

*Old War Office Building
(right) seen from
Horseguards Avenue.
The entrance to Main
Building is on the left*



The Location – Whitehall

The area at the west end of today's Whitehall was in older times the Royal Palace of Westminster, close by the Abbey. This Palace was an un-coordinated collection of buildings, many virtually unchanged for well over 100 years, cold, draughty and uncomfortable.

In the reign of Henry VIII, Cardinal Wolsey, then Lord Chancellor and the Archbishop of York, had use of the London residence of the Archbishops of York which was called 'York Place' and lay just north of the Westminster Palace area. Wolsey had carried out major rebuilding at York Place, creating a modern, palatial residence. With the fall of Wolsey in 1529 Henry VIII appropriated the whole area for his personal use. This formed the basis of the new 'Whitehall' Palace. (The term 'Whitehall', first recorded in 1532, had its origin in the white ashlar stone used for Wolsey's Palace).

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Following this acquisition of York Place, Westminster was used only for ceremonial purposes and the administrative processes that it already housed. This was confirmed by an Act of Parliament of 1535 which declared the:

*'old and ancient palace of Westminster'
to 'only a member and parcell of the
said new Palace'.*

While Shakespeare, in his play 'Henry VII', includes the following lines:

'Sir, you must no more call it York Place;
that's past. For since the Cardinal fell,
that title's lost; 'Tis now the King's and
called Whitehall'



*Aerial view of vicinity
around Old War Office*

Henry VIII not only continued Wolsey's building programme but he extended it, acquiring properties on the west side of the thoroughfare from Westminster to Charing Cross and enclosing the adjacent fields to form what is now St. James's Park.

The palace covered 23 acres between St James's Park and the river. On the park side of the road, Henry VIII built his pleasure buildings, similar to those he built

Whitehall became the premier palace of the Tudors and Stuarts. However, in 1698 in the reign of William III it was almost entirely destroyed by fire, allegedly due to the carelessness of a Dutch washerwoman, one of William III's servants, who set some linen to dry by a charcoal fire in one of the lodgings by the river. The linen caught fire and this quickly spread through the palace, which had become very ramshackle and which had seen many previous outbreaks

premier palace of the Tudors and Stuarts

later at Hampton Court. These included four covered courts for real or 'royal' tennis, a bowling alley, a cockpit, a tiltyard and a pheasant yard. On the river side of the road were the Royal Apartments, the Great Hall, the Chapel, the Privy Gardens, nobleman's lodgings and, towards Charing Cross, numerous service buildings such as kitchens, a coal wharf and stables at Charing Cross itself.

of fire – including a serious one in 1691. Following the fire, St James's Palace (also built by Henry VIII) became the official London residence of the sovereign. The former Palace site was used both for a number of fine 18th century town houses as well as less stately buildings housing both government officials and private citizens and businesses. These in their turn were demolished to make way for the Government offices which occupy the area today.

The building

A history of the Old War Office Building



The Old War Office Building

The original War Office on the south side of Pall Mall had, even in its earliest days, proved too small and inefficient. It consisted not of a single building, but rather a number of adjoining houses linked by doorways in the partition walls; other elements of the staff were housed in other buildings, some distance away. This had such an impact on staff numbers that in 1886, out of 958 officials in the War Office, 164 were employed as messengers.

So poor were the facilities, and the ill-health of its staff so well known, that a newspaper commented in the 1860's that:

'employment in the War Office, in consequence of the sickness and mortality attending it, should rank in point of danger at about the same level as an Ashantee campaign'

The Old War Office Building. Pre-1914





*The Army Council
room (1920)*



*The Secretary of State
for Defence's office
(2001)*

Even as late as the early 1900's, the Directorate of Military Operations staff, which had to be based in Winchester House in St James's Square, seemed to suffer frequently from what was known as "Winchester House sore throat", thought to be the result of the vapours from a large cesspit over which it had been built.

General agreement about the need for a new War Office building first led to proposals in the late 1850's for its inclusion in government offices in Downing Street, then in the late 1860's for a new building on Great George Street to house both the Admiralty and War Office. Factional opposition in Parliament, as well as concerns over the status of the Commander-in-Chief *vis a vis* the Secretary of State, delayed matters further. In the late 1870's, an Embankment site was proposed but a financial crisis put an end to that scheme. A new Admiralty and War Office on the existing Admiralty site in Whitehall was next suggested but was again stopped by Parliamentary opposition.



King Edward VII's coronation procession along Whitehall in front of the construction site of the War Office (1902)

The subsequent extension to the existing Admiralty building in the 1890's delayed a final decision on the future War Office site and not until 1896 was it agreed that a site east of Whitehall should be used.

Mr William Young FRIBA was the architect commissioned in 1898 by HM Office of Works to design the 'new' War Office. Sadly, he died two years later, but the design was completed by his son, Clyde Young, and Sir John Taylor, consultant surveyor to HM Office of Works.

The building is of trapezium shape. This was dictated by the need to use all available space to maximise the accommodation, on a site surrounded by existing buildings. Digging began in 1899, and in order to carry the weight of the

building, a huge 'tank' with concrete walls and base up to 6 feet thick and 30 feet below the road level, was constructed. The first brick was laid in September 1901 and when the building was completed in 1906 it had used some 26,000 tons of Portland stone and 3,000 tons of York stone, as well as 25 million bricks. Using what was then called 'Renaissance' style (now called 'Edwardian Baroque'), Young designed the west Whitehall-facing front as the chief elevation. The west and north fronts from the second floor upwards received a row of Ionic columns. Along the roof were placed sculptured figures symbolising Peace and War, Truth and Justice, Fame and Victory and on top of each of the four corner towers a decorative dome was put in order to mask the irregularity of the building's shape.



The Main Entrance, Grand Hall and Staircase were placed in the centre of the west front, with the principal rooms on the second floor. The Secretary of State for War occupied a suite above the main entrance (now known as the Haldane Suite) while the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State occupied the room across the main staircases. The Chief of the General (later Imperial General) Staff, then Lt Gen Hon Sir Neville Gerald Lytton, initially had his office in a large room in the centre of the southern side. The circular tower rooms at the corners were for other members of the Army Council and the Army Council Room was in the centre of the north side. The more important rooms and office suites were decorated with great care, and a few were adorned with oak panelling. Several fine marble fireplaces came from the various aristocratic residences occupied by the then 'old' War Office in Pall Mall, including Cumberland (formerly York)

House and Buckingham House. Two are attributed to well known sculptors, John Bacon RA and Thomas Carter, and all are over 200 years old. A Parliamentary Answer in April 1910 gave the full cost of the 'new' War Office as £1,229,128.

Among the notable Secretaries of State for War to work in the building in its early years were Lord Haldane (1905-12), Mr Asquith (1914), Lord Kitchener (1914-16), Mr Lloyd-George (1916) and Winston Churchill (1919-21). For the early part of his tenure, Churchill held the combined post of Secretary of State for War and Air before the posts were separated in February 1921.

With the outbreak of War in August 1914, the General Staff left to take up posts with the deployed Army in France and Flanders and many retired officers from the Reserve of Officers were re-employed to fill the now vacant War Office posts.



*Lord Kitchener,
Secretary of State
for War
(1914-16)*



*David Lloyd-George,
Secretary of State
for War (1916) and
Prime Minister
(1916-22)*

*The main 'marble'
staircase in the centre
of the west front*

Sir Charles Callwell, on 5th August 1914 a Colonel who had been on retired pay for seven years, took over as Director of Military Operations with the temporary rank of Major-General.

According to one visitor the War Office was a nightmare in those early days: it resembled Liverpool Street station on the evening of a rainless Bank Holiday. The numbers were swollen by the employment of Boy Scouts as messengers. Callwell illustrated what he described as an excellent innovation, with the following story:

A day or two after joining I wanted to make the acquaintance of a colonel, who I found was under me in charge of a branch, a new hand like myself, but whose apartment nobody in the place could indicate. A War Office messenger despatched to find him came back empty-handed. Another War Office messenger

*Fireplace in the
Haldane Suite*





*The second floor
principal landing*

sent on the same errand on the morrow proved no more successful. On the third day I summoned a boy scout into my presence – a very small one – and commanded him to find that colonel and not to come back without him. In about ten minutes' time the door was flung open and in walked the scout, followed by one of the biggest sort of colonels. "I did not know what I had done or where I was being taken", remarked the colonel, "but the boy made it quite clear that he wasn't going to have any nonsense; so I thought it best to come quietly" (1).

The continual increase in numbers throughout the War Office included several officers temporarily commissioned for their specialist knowledge. One such was T E Lawrence, commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant on 23rd October 1914 and employed in M04, the Geographical Section, to produce a large scale map of Sinai and a military guide to the region based on his extensive peacetime travels.

The 'dome' above the main staircase in the Old War Office Building seen from below



The problem of accommodating further staff became acute and it was now that the flat roof of the War Office proved such a valuable feature. On 9th October 1914 the Office of Works informed the Treasury that the space requirements of the War Office could best be met by the erection of an additional storey on the top of the War Office Building. The fifth storey of wooden huts was soon completed and later provided with a layer of air raid protection nets to ward off bombs. These huts were unofficially known as 'Zeppelin Terrace'.

As the demands for space grew, Government departments spread far and wide across London. The National Liberal Club (just across Whitehall Court from the War Office) was requisitioned in September 1916 and became the 'War Office Annexe',

and by January 1919 no fewer than 52 buildings in London were either wholly or partially occupied by the War Office's staff, including over a dozen hotels. Further temporary buildings were put up on the Victoria Gardens on the Embankment and became known as the 'Embankment Annexe'. Sir Sam Fay considered them

'convenient and well lighted, better than similar accommodation in the War Office. The corridors ran round monuments to William Tindale, Bartle Frere and Outram. Few in the corridors knew that monuments to these illustrious Englishmen were encased within the building.' (2)

...accommodating further staff became acute
the flat roof of the War Office proved such a
valuable feature...

The Inter-War Years

With the Armistice of 1918, matters gradually returned to the pre-war pattern and remained largely unchanged until, with the likelihood of war approaching in the late 1930's, some reinforcement work was carried out in the basement of the War Office Building, as with many other government offices in Whitehall, to provide enhanced protection against air attack.

World War II

At the outbreak of World War Two in 1939, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff (CIGS) was Lt Gen Henry Pownall. His stepson recalled the following story recounted by CIGS from the September day when, after the Prime Minister broadcast that Britain was at war with Germany, the sirens wailed over London.

"The War Office staff left their offices for the basement as the sirens sounded. The slamming of doors sounding down the lift shafts, convinced many in the basement that an air raid was in progress."

Subsequently with staff working around the clock, many of them ignored all but the closest bomb raids. The roof spotters would alert staff to such raids at which point staff would go to the shelters in the sub-basement which also housed an all night canteen. On 8 October 1940 a stick of



*Sir Winston Churchill,
Secretary of State for
War, 1918-21
and Prime Minister,
1940-5 and 1951-5*

staff worked around the clock, many of them ignoring all but the closest bomb raids

four bombs did hit the War Office, fortunately causing only superficial damage but killing one person. Otherwise, despite a further seven hits, the building remained relatively unscathed, the damage mainly confined to its upper levels.

Reflecting the double role of the War Office as a department of state and a military headquarters, a young officer posted into the War Office in 1940 recalled how the then Director of Army Staff Duties, Major-General A E Nye told him that:

'In the last war there was friction between the 'frocks' (civil servants) and the 'uniforms'. This must not happen in this war. You must remember that every civil servant is not necessarily a fifth columnist.' (3)

During the early part of the war, Leslie Hore-Belisha, now remembered mainly for his introduction of the Belisha Beacon while Minister of Transport, held the post of Secretary of State for War. He had been brought in by the Prime Minister as a "moderniser", with Basil

Liddell-Hart as a private adviser. 1940 saw four holders of the post of Secretary of State with Hore-Belisha being replaced by Oliver Stanley, who in turn gave way to Anthony Eden. Eden, having resigned as Foreign Secretary in 1938, was appointed Secretary of State for War by Churchill in May 1940, before again becoming Foreign Secretary later in the year. The period from 1942-45 saw Sir Percy Grigg as Secretary of State. Unusually, before becoming an MP, he had served as the senior civil servant in the Department.

Post War

In the post-war period from 1945 the War Office, once again, reverted to peace-time routine. The experience of Viscount Slim, appointed Chief of the Imperial General Staff in 1948, when he first arrived to take up his appointment, is recorded as follows:

'One chilly November morning in 1948, in black overcoat and Homburg hat, I walked up the main steps of the War Office to be confronted by the tall frock coated Head Porter in his gold banded top hat. He looked down at me and I

looked up at him; there could be no question which of us was the more impressive figure. He asked me civilly but without cordiality, what was my business and was about to direct me to the side entrance for unimportant callers, when I rather hesitantly said: "As a matter of fact, I'm the new CIGS". A look of amazed incredulity passed over his face.' (4)



Clock celebrating the re-opening of the Old War Office Building in 1992

Notable Secretaries of State in the Post War years included "Manny" Shinwell, who proved very popular in the post (indeed, it was said that he "turned the trepidation his appointment roused at the War Office into devoted loyalty"), J Hare, who presided over the decision to end conscription in the Army, and Christopher Soames who, having previously served as a minister in both the Air Ministry and Admiralty completed an unusual hat-trick when appointed to the War Office in 1958. He was replaced in 1960 by John Profumo, who was brought in by the Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, to help boost the public's perception of the new "All Regular Army" following the end of conscription. Profumo resigned in well publicised circumstances in 1963.

The War Office remained the centre of the Army's administration until, with the formation of the unified Ministry of Defence on 1 April 1964, much of the former Army Department transferred across Horse Guards Avenue to the Ministry of Defence



The Chiefs of Staff Committee in their new Committee Room in the Old War Office Building

'Main' Building. The last Secretary of State for War, J Ramsden, became Minister for the Army in the new unified MOD. Considerable reorganisation took place in the "Old" War Office Building (as it now became known) and it now fulfilled a tri-service or, more precisely, an MOD role and, while it retained a considerable Army presence (including the Engineer-in-Chief), it also played host to several RAF branches and the Navy's Hydrographer.

In 1979 it was agreed that a refurbishment should be undertaken in order that the building could remain serviceable until well into the next century. Staff began to move out and by 1985 the building was ready for the work to begin, although a few branches remained in the building almost throughout the refurbishment. The building was officially reopened in its new guise by Sir Christopher France, then Permanent Secretary, on 22 December 1992 and was primarily the new headquarters for the Defence Intelligence Staffs (DIS).

Following the refurbishment of the building it was possible to return some of the works of art, articles of furniture and artefacts from the more important offices and, in addition, paintings were provided from the Government and MOD art collections.

During the refurbishment of the Main Building, the Old War Office Building is being used to provide the offices for the Ministers, Service Chiefs and senior officials. The historic Haldane Suite is now the office of the Secretary of State for Defence.



Geoff Hoon, the Secretary of State for Defence with UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, in his office in the Old War Office Building, June 2001

Other buildings

A history of the Old War Office Building



Northumberland House, formerly the 'Hotel Victoria'

Metropole Building, formerly the 'Hotel Metropole'

Northumberland House & Metropole Building

By the nineteenth century the majority of the great late-medieval 'river palaces' that ran along the Strand west towards Charing Cross had been replaced by more modern and less prestigious dwellings. The sole survivor in private hands was Northumberland House which had been built during the reign of James I in 1605.

However with the creation of the Thames Embankment, the London Metropolitan Board of Works proposed in 1865 to create a new major road from Charing Cross and Trafalgar Square down to the river. Attempts to purchase the site were initially opposed by the Duke of Northumberland, but the building was damaged by fire in 1868 and in late 1873 his heir agreed to sell the Northumberland House site and several other nearby properties for some £500,000.



*Architectural detail
in the ceiling moulds
of Metropole Building,
a reminder of its
luxurious past*

American visitors in particular tended to use the Northumberland Avenue hotels which were palatial and luxurious...

By early 1876 Northumberland House had been demolished and a new 30 metre-wide thoroughfare created along which, by the 1880's, new buildings were being erected. Among these were several hotels, the Grand Hotel, the Hotel Metropole and the Hotel Victoria built by the Northumberland Avenue Hotel Company. This spate of hotel building was something of a fashion at the time despite the fact that many projects proved to be costly over-runs; the hotel Victoria, for example, cost £520,000, more than double the original estimate, probably reflecting the need for very deep foundations because of an underground stream on the site.

According to historians of the hotel trade, American visitors in particular tended to use the Northumberland Avenue hotels which were palatial and luxurious, and had the advantage of a central position with easy access to both the City and the West End and to Parliament and the 'Clubs' as well as to the major railway termini.



*Decorative 'marble'
detail in the foyer of
Northumberland House*

Northumberland

A history of the Old War Office Building

Northumberland House

The Hotel Victoria which was completed under new ownership, although slightly smaller than planned as some ground (the site of the current Nigeria House) had to be sold because of rising costs, opened in 1887. Its name reflected the Queen's Golden Jubilee. With 500 bedrooms it was one of only five hotels of comparable size then in London and only one other was significantly larger.

The layout and design of the hotel reflected the prevailing luxurious style of the day, with ornate dining rooms and other public areas. The Hotel Victoria was one of the first to be lit throughout by electricity, powered from

its own dynamos. Full bathrooms however were not an automatic inclusion, the Hotel Victoria having only four and there was no running water in the bedrooms, although a shallow, movable bath was located under each bed which could be filled by servants with a few inches of water to provide the guests with a basic washing facility.

In 1893 Frederick Gordon, the owner of nearby Hotel Metropole, bought the Hotel Victoria, thereby gaining possession of all the hotels in the avenue and so eliminating all close competition. The Hotel like others built up a valuable trade with contracts for annual dinners of learned societies and regimental associations as well as providing showcase space to retailers anxious to advertise their wares.

A major renovation of the building planned in 1911 was delayed by the First World War during which, in common with others in the

Stained glass window originally in the hotel's banqueting hall



House



area, it was used primarily by government staffs although its 'Grill Room' was leased by Cox's Bank.

for government and service staffs, the hotel closed in 1940 when it was requisitioned by the War Office. It was purchased by the

The Hotel Victoria had no running water in the bedrooms, although a shallow, movable bath was located under each bed

At the end of the war the renovation re-started and the Billiard Room was converted into a banqueting suite with its own separate entrance at the southern end of the building and was given the title the Edward VII Rooms. Further modernisation took place in the inter-war years, including the addition of hand-basins in every bedroom and more full bathrooms, while modern decoration was also added to some public areas.

With the outbreak of the Second World War and the need for additional accommodation

Government in 1951 and has remained in government use, known first as Victoria Buildings then as Northumberland House. The former Banqueting Room is now a theatre used by amateur dramatic societies.

Having been transferred to MOD's custody in 1996, it has, among other things, housed the nursery for children of MOD staff in London. It is now playing its part as a 'decant' building for Main Building staff during the major refurbishment of the Main Building.

Metropole

A history of the Old War Office Building



This decorative ceiling rose is evidence of the Hotel Metropole's grandeur

Metropole Building

Metropole Building also had its origin in the spate of hotel building along Northumberland Avenue. It was the second hotel in that road to be constructed by the Gordon Hotels Company. Construction started in 1883 and it opened in 1885 as the Hotel Metropole and announced itself through an 88 page brochure which claimed that the hotel's location would:

'Particularly recommend it to ladies and families visiting the West End during the Season; to travellers from Paris and the Continent, arriving from Dover and Folkestone at the Charing Cross Terminus; to Officers and others attending the levees at St James; to Ladies going to the Drawing Rooms, State Balls, and Concerts at Buckingham Palace; and to colonial and American visitors unused to the great world of London'.

*Architectural detail
above one of the
original doorways*



The hotel apparently prospered at the turn of the century and was a popular venue for banquets, balls and dinner parties. For example the Aero Club (founded in 1901) and the Alpine Club both held an annual dinner function at the Metropole for some years spanning the turn of the century. An advertisement in the 1914 War Office List claims it to be:

'Of world-wide reputation. Central position in Northumberland Avenue, Trafalgar Square. Close to fashionable quarter, best shopping district, theatres, etc. Luxurious suites with bathrooms attached. Magnificent hotel lounge. Telephone in every bedroom. Orchestra.'

*Clues to Metropole
Building's rich history
are evident in many
of the retained
features*

The Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII) is reputed to have entertained guests at the hotel on various occasions; he presumably used the Royal Suite. The exact location of this is unclear, but is suggested by some to have been the first floor rooms with bow-fronted windows on the elevation fronting Whitehall Place.

*Richly decorated and
ornate columns give
clues to the buildings
opulent history*



During the First World War, as with most of the buildings in Northumberland Avenue, including the other hotels, the Constitutional Club and the offices of the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, the Metropole was requisitioned to provide accommodation for government staff.

The Metropole reopened after the War and it is said that the famous band leader Mantovani played in there in the inter-war years. It remained in use as a hotel until 1936 when it was leased by the government for £300,000 to provide



alternative accommodation for the various departments which had to be removed from Whitehall Gardens to make way for the construction of the new block of Government Offices planned for that site.

The building continued in government use during and after the Second World War. By 1951 it included among its occupants a considerable number of staff from the Air Ministry. Throughout subsequent years it has remained in MOD hands and is now playing its part as a 'decant' building for Main Building staff during the forthcoming

major refurbishment of the Main Building. During this time the mirrored ballroom will provide the setting for Press Conferences and other major events.

Main building

A history of the Old War Office Building

*Statues of 'Earth' and
'Water' sculpted by
Sir Charles Wheeler,
placed over the
main north door.*



MOD Main Building

By the turn of the twentieth century some government offices were already established in several old Georgian houses in the area of Whitehall Gardens on the east side of Whitehall. In 1909 it was decided to erect a new building primarily for the Department of Trade. The site was to extend over other parts of Whitehall Gardens and also on ground running down to the Embankment, but opposition to this plan led to the agreement that the southern building line should be that of Whitehall Court and the National Liberal Club, thus conceding some 10,000 square feet.

The architect selected was Mr E Vincent Harris, who won a national competition to design a new building for occupation by a number of Government departments. Planned as a single block faced in Portland stone, some 128 feet high and 570 feet long with a depth of 205 feet widening to 300

...re-located the whole Cellar into the new building itself, moving it both some nine feet to the west and nearly nineteen feet deeper.

feet, it had four internal blocks with ten storeys and three large internal courts; the two main facades faced Whitehall and the Victoria Embankment. The estimated cost was some £5 million.

However, construction was delayed by the First World War and then by the inter-war depression, so that it was not until 1938 that the demolition of the houses in Whitehall Gardens began. Major building operations were then halted during the Second World War, except for work on two underground citadels which continued until 1942, albeit with a reduced labour force.

Although the Georgian houses in Whitehall Gardens were to be demolished, five rooms from 'Pembroke House', 'Cromwell House' and 'Cadogan House' were to be dismantled and incorporated as Conference Rooms (known today as



*King Henry VIII's
Wine Cellar*



*Aerial photograph
showing the Ministry of
Defence Main Building*

'Historic Rooms') on the third and fourth floors of the new building.

In addition, following a request from Queen Mary in 1938 and a promise in Parliament, provision was made for the preservation of the Wine Cellar, the only substantial part of the old 'Whitehall Palace' that remained after the disastrous fire of 1698 and a fine example of a Tudor brick-vaulted roof some 70 feet long and 30 feet wide. However the existing position of the Cellar, used in the years immediately prior to the demolition of 'Cadogan House' which surrounded it, as a luncheon club for Ministry of Transport

five rooms from 'Pembroke House', 'Cromwell House' and 'Cadogan House' were to be dismantled and incorporated as Conference Rooms

staff, was found to interfere not just with the plan for the new building but also with the proposed route for Horse Guards Avenue. Accordingly, once building was resumed

after the war, work was set in hand to re-locate the whole Cellar into the new building itself, moving it both some nine feet to the west and nearly nineteen feet deeper. This major operation was carried out without significant damage to the structure and it now rests safe within the basement of the new building.

In this immediate post-war period, work recommenced in earnest and by 1951 the north part of the building (known as the New Government Offices) was ready for the Board of Trade. Statues of 'Earth' and 'Water' sculpted by Sir Charles Wheeler were placed over the main north door. These were meant to be complemented by similar figures to represent 'Air' and 'Fire' at the south end, but in the event these were not incorporated when this part of the building was handed over to the Air Ministry in 1958/59.

Although the building's appearance was praised in the Building Magazine in its September 1951 issue, the architectural historian Nicholas Pevsner was less

complimentary: he called it a 'monument of tiredness'. (5)

In 1964, a requirement for a single, large building was created by the merger of the three Service Ministries and the formation of the unified Ministry of Defence. The new Government Building in Whitehall was considered most suitable; with the move of the Board of Trade to Victoria, the Building was free for sole occupancy by the new MOD and became thereby the 'Main Building'.

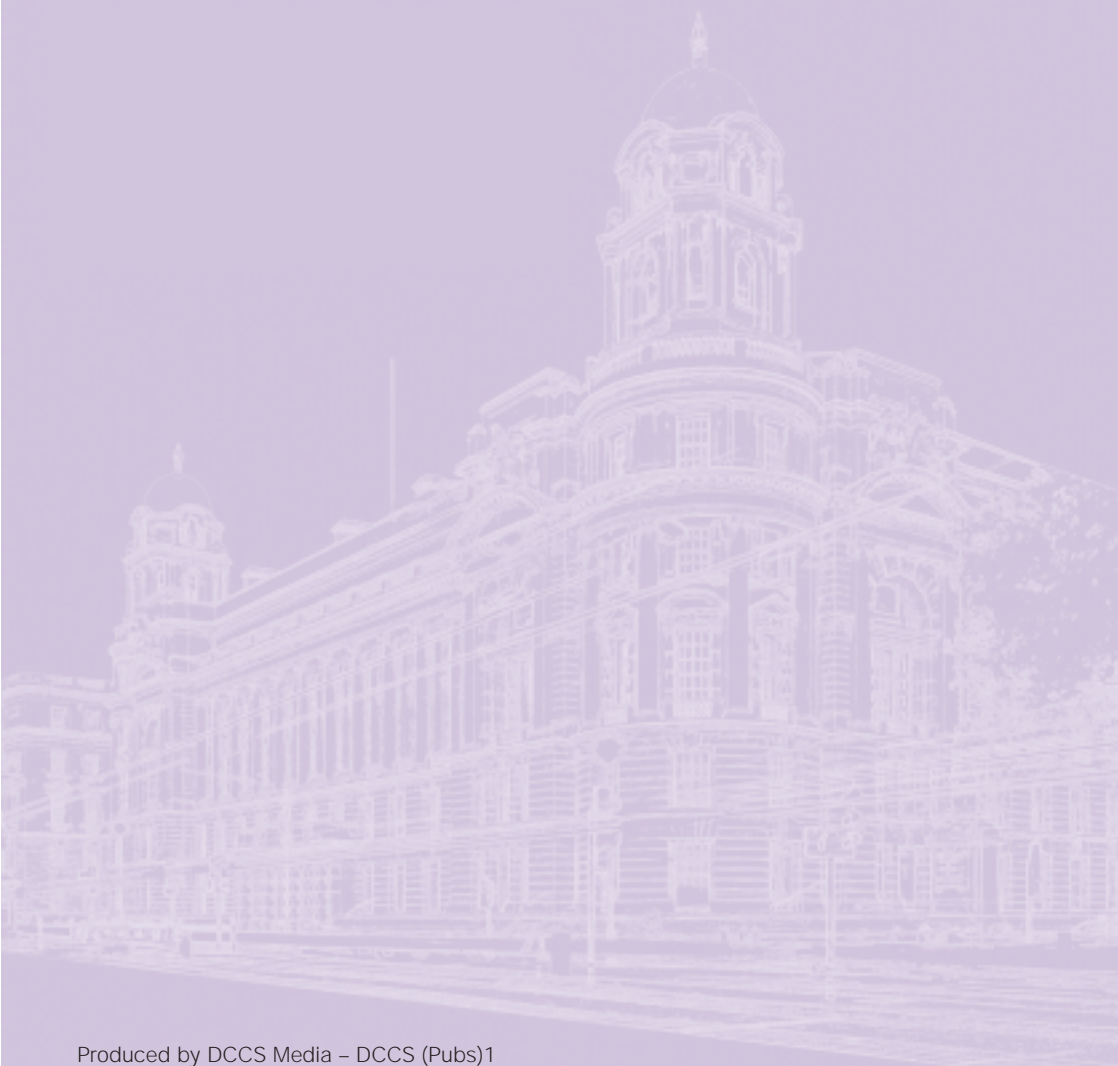
After 50 years, the Building is currently being refurbished to provide modern, fit for purpose, office accommodation for MOD staff in London. Staff are scheduled to start moving back to 'Main Building' towards the end of 2004.



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A large part of above is taken from the essay, "The War Office Old and New" first published in issue 15 of 'Stand To! The Journal of the Western Front Association' in 1985.

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MINISTRY OF DEFENCE