



The Story of **Burlington House**

Front Cover Images:

Right:
Burlington House in 1871
by Thomas Heaviside

Left:
Burlington House
in 2010



Sources:

Arnold, DA 1992, *The Story of Burlington House*, Royal Society of Chemistry, London.

Hutchison, SC 1956, *The Homes of the Royal Academy*, Royal Academy of Arts, London.

Martin, DC 1967, 'Former Homes of the Royal Society', *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London*, vol. 22, pp. 12-19.

Pinckheard, J 1968, 'New Accommodation for the Chemical Society', *Chemistry in Britain*, vol. 4, no. 12, pp. 530-534.

Schmitt, P & Hopkins, O n.d., *Burlington House: A Brief History*, Royal Academy of Arts, London.

Burlington House is home to:

The Society of Antiquaries of London
founded 1707

The Royal Academy of Arts
founded 1768

The Linnean Society of London
founded 1788

The Geological Society of London
founded 1807

The Royal Astronomical Society
founded 1820

The Royal Society of Chemistry
(formerly the Chemical Society)
founded 1841

The Geologists' Association
founded 1858

The British Astronomical Association
founded 1890

A Faltering Start

Since 1857, Burlington House has been the home of the Royal Society of Chemistry, the Society of Antiquaries, the Royal Academy of Arts, the Linnean Society, the Geological Society of London and the Royal Astronomical Society. The Royal Society of Chemistry was formed of four similar societies in 1980, the two largest being the Chemical Society (1841) and the Royal Institute of Chemistry (1877). Prior to settling in to their current premises in Burlington House, both organisations had various homes around London, including the Strand, Cavendish Square and Russell Square. What follows is the history of how Burlington House came in to being; it begins in the days before the Great Fire of London, when Charles II had just become King of England and memories of the Civil War were still vivid.

In 1664, Sir John Denham, a wealthy lawyer and poet, was offered some land by the King in lieu of the loyalty he had shown during the English Civil War. It was said that he chose this site because he was convinced that no one would build beyond him in the fields to the north and west far away from the busy streets of the City.

The original house was built for the reception of his new bride, Margaret Brooke, a niece of the Earl of Bristol, she was 18 and he was 50. They were married in Westminster Abbey and the Duke of York, later James II, was among those present. Within months, Margaret had become the Duke's mistress but the affair was not a clandestine one. In October 1666, the diarist Samuel Pepys recorded:

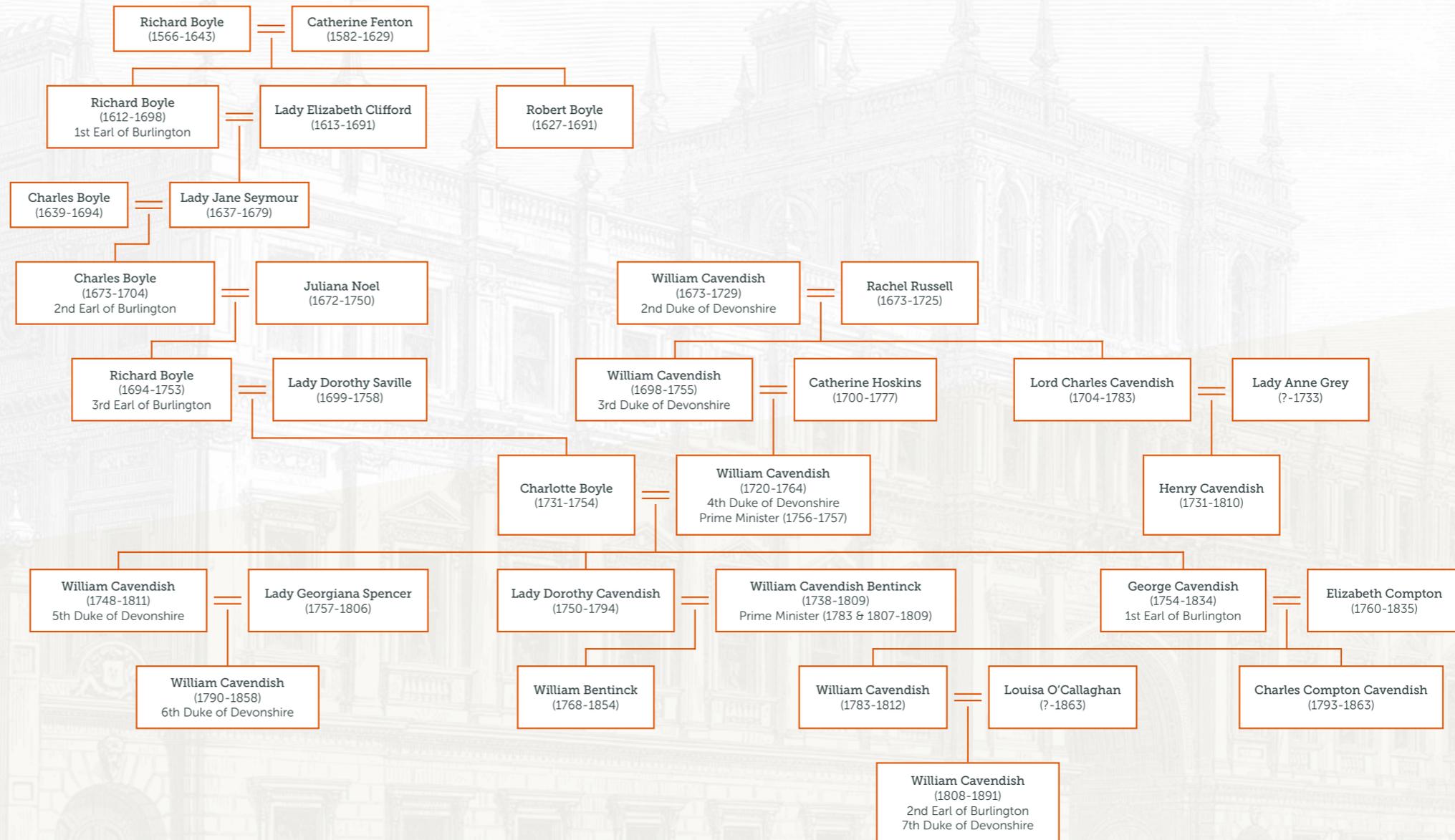
'To Whitehall, and there the Duke of York, who has gone over to all his pleasures again, what with his woman, Lady Denham, and his hunting three times a week'

Knowledge of his wife's infidelity tormented Sir John and when she was found dead at their home, seemingly as a result of poisoning, he was one of those suspected of being responsible for her death. A subsequent autopsy however, revealed no trace of poison.

In 1667, after the death of his wife, Sir John sold his home and the three and a half acre site to Richard Boyle, 1st Earl of Burlington. Boyle had strong connections to the county of York and the title of 'Burlington' that was created for him by Charles II in 1664 is said to have been derived from the name of 'Bridlington' in that county. The house he'd bought from Denham was from then on to be known by the name of Burlington.

And so, for the next 187 years Burlington House was to be the home for two distinguished families...

The Boyles and the Cavendish's



Building Burlington House

Richard Boyle employed the services of architect Hugh May to help complete the design of the house but progress was slow due to increased demand on labour as a result of the Great Fire of London.

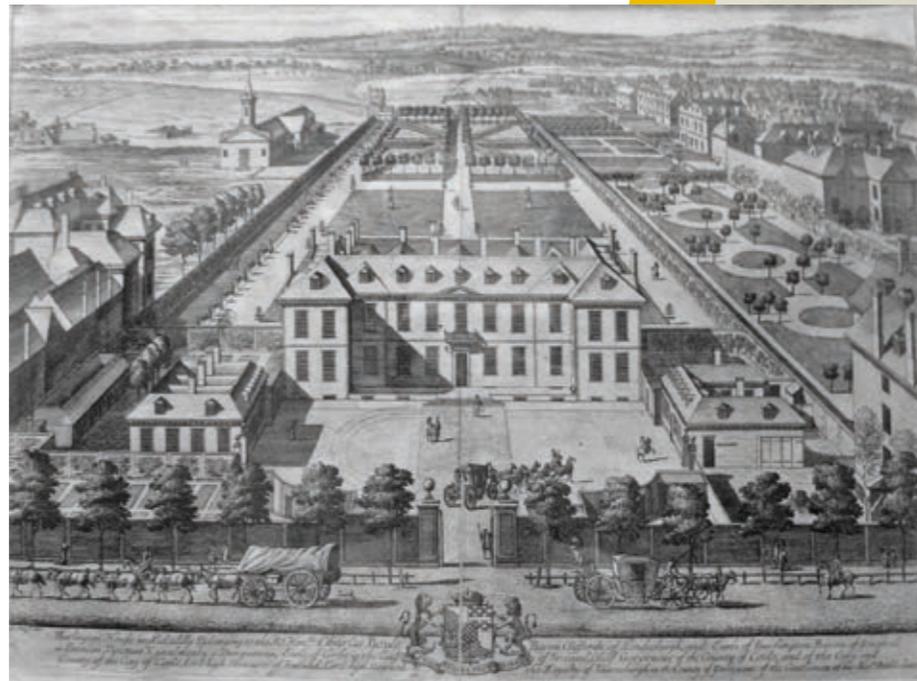
However, Burlington House was eventually completed and Samuel Pepys wrote on 28th September 1668:

'Thence to my Lord Burlington's House, the first time I was there, it being the house built by Sir John Denham'.

The 1st Earl's son died before him in 1694, so when he died in 1698, his grandson Charles was next to inherit his title. The 2nd Earl of Burlington was widely respected as 'one of the most accomplished gentlemen in England', but he lived for only a further 7 years. His son, Richard, inherited Burlington House and became the 3rd Earl of Burlington at the age of 9 in 1704.

As he didn't come in to his inheritance until 1717, Richard's mother Juliana began the renovation of Burlington House. She employed the services of renowned architect James Gibbs; his most significant work is thought to be the church at St Martin-in-the-Fields. Gibbs' chief change to the exterior of Burlington House was the construction of a semi-circular colonnade in the courtyard.

During the 3rd Earls' lifetime, his house was the regular meeting place of all the leading wits, poets and learned men of the day, including Alexander Pope, Dean Swift and John Gay. The great musician Handel lived there for three years from 1713, in frail health and under the personal care of Lady Burlington. Whilst there, he continued to compose. He would later dedicate his operas 'Teseo' and 'Amadigi di Gaula' to the Earl.



Burlington House c. 1707 by Johannes Kip

John Gay referenced Handel and Burlington House in his poem 'Trivia: Or, the Art of Walking the Streets of London' (1716):

*Yet Burlington's fair palace still remains;
Beauty within, without proportion
reigns. Beneath his eye declining art
revives, The Wall with animated picture
lives; There Handel strikes the strings,
the melting strain Transports the soul,
and thrills through every vein;
There oft I enter (but with cleaner shoes)
For Burlington's beloved by every muse*

In 1717, the 3rd Earl began a transformation of Burlington House with the collaboration of the architect Colen Campbell. The whole of the façade was redesigned and most of the interior was restructured and extended on a grand scale. By the time he'd turned 23, the 3rd Earl was generally regarded as one of the few members of the aristocracy who 'have the talent of laying out their own fortunes with propriety, and making their own private judgement contribute to the public ornament'.

He was distinguished for his interest in natural philosophy and his patronage of all the arts, and for a very splendid and refined taste in architecture. He also became known as the 'Architect Earl' and by paying for the publication of 'The Designs of Inigo Jones' (1727) and 'The Four Books of Andrea Palladio's Architecture' (1737) he made a contribution of crucial importance to the Neo-Palladian movement in architecture in England.

In 1731, the 3rd Earl commissioned Italian sculptor, Giovanni Battista Guelfi, to create a bust of his great-Uncle Robert Boyle. Robert Boyle was the 1st Earl of Burlington's younger brother and having written 'The Sceptical Chymist' in 1661 was generally regarded as 'the father of modern chemistry'. The white marbled bust commissioned by the 3rd Earl was acquired by the Royal Society of Chemistry in 2003 because of its dual connection to chemistry and to Burlington House and now stands on display in the reception area.



Robert Boyle (1627-1691)

The Boyles to the Cavendishes... and Back Again

Richard Boyle, the 3rd Earl, died in 1753 and so Burlington House passed to his widow and then to their grandson William Cavendish. William Cavendish's mother Charlotte Boyle (the 3rd Earl's daughter) was married to the 4th Duke of Devonshire and so when the Duke died in 1764, William became the 5th Duke of Devonshire. Scientist Henry Cavendish, 2nd cousin to the 4th Duke of Devonshire also stayed at Burlington House for several years as a young man in the mid-18th century. Cavendish is credited with having discovered hydrogen (what he referred to as 'flammable air') in 1766.

William Cavendish, the 5th Duke, married Lady Georgiana Spencer in 1774, she was the great-great-great-great aunt to Diana, Princess of Wales and their lives are depicted in the movie 'The Duchess' (2008). The Devonshire's rarely used Burlington House as they preferred to use Devonshire House (further along Piccadilly) as their main residence. So, in 1770, they leased the house to the Duke's brother-in-law, William Cavendish-Bentinck, the 3rd Duke of Portland.

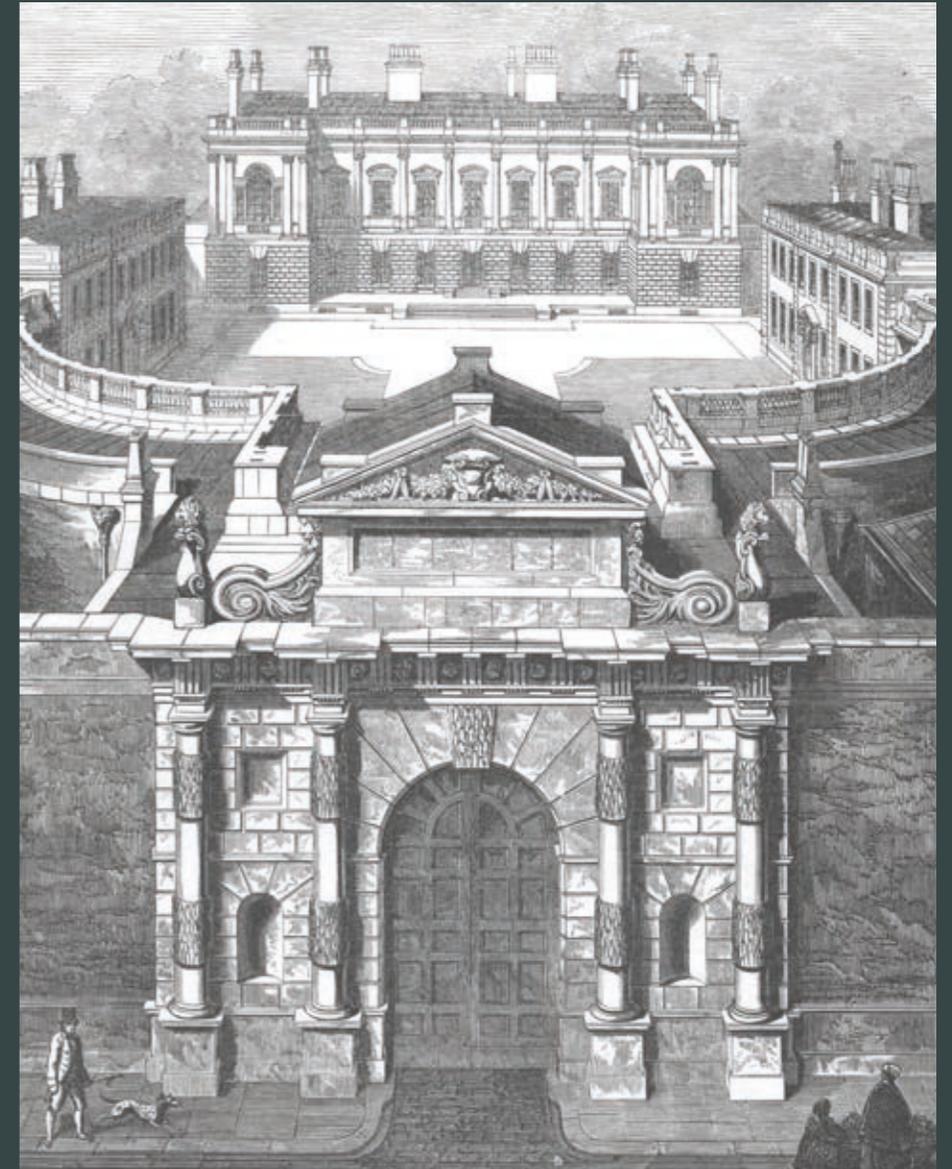
William Cavendish-Bentinck became the only UK Prime Minister to have switched political parties. In 1783, he was Prime Minister for the Whig (Liberal) party and 23 years later in 1807, he was Prime Minister again, but this time as a Tory. In his lifetime, he'd held a title of every degree of British nobility (he is also the great-great-great grandfather to Queen Elizabeth II). When he died in 1809, Burlington House passed back to the 5th Duke of Devonshire and then upon his death in 1811, to his son, William, the 6th Duke.



Henry Cavendish (1731-1810)

Before his death, in 1811, the 5th Duke gave permission to Lord Elgin to store the Elgin Marbles in the grounds to the west side of Burlington House, Lord Elgin having failed to sell the Marbles to the Government. The Marbles were still there in 1815 and Elgin remarked in a letter that they were 'decaying from the destructive dampness'. In 1816, a Parliamentary committee came to a decision to purchase the Marbles and they were re-located to the British Museum.

In 1815, the 6th Duke of Devonshire sold the house to his uncle, Lord George Cavendish and with architect Samuel Ware made a number of considerable but unobtrusive changes over the next 3 years. By the order of Lord Cavendish in 1819, Burlington Arcade was built along the west side of Burlington House. The title of Earl of Burlington that had died with Richard Boyle in 1753 was revived by King William IV in 1831 and bestowed upon Lord George and so the owner of Burlington House was once again the Earl of Burlington. His son William had pre-deceased him in 1812, so when George died in Burlington House in 1834, the title went to his grandson William but the house passed to his widow and then to their son Charles.



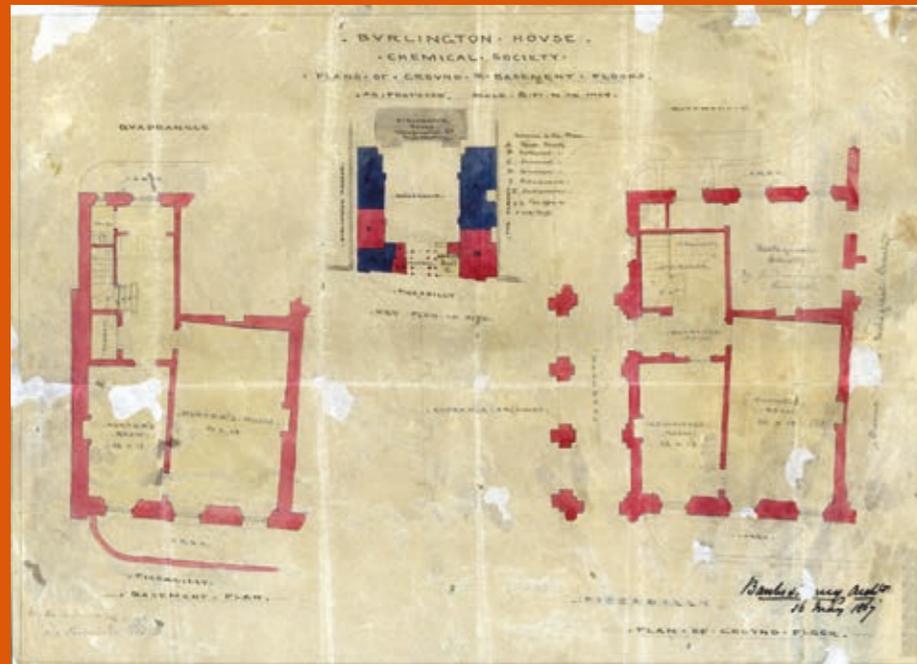
Burlington House c. 1815

From Grand Home to a Centre of Learning

Some 20 years later, in 1854, the Government purchased Burlington House and the gardens for £140,000. In 1856, they offered the use of the house to the Royal Society, the Chemical Society and the Linnean Society on a temporary basis. This offer was made as a result of a Memorandum by the Earl of Rosse, President of the Royal Society. The Memorandum recommended that the Government provide accommodation 'under one roof' for the learned societies, an idea which was welcomed enthusiastically by Prince Albert.

In 1859, the Government instructed the firm of Banks and Barry (principal architects in the construction of the Houses of Parliament) to prepare a plan for buildings occupying the entire site. The purpose was to house a new Royal Academy of Arts, the University of London, a museum of patented inventions, and to provide

accommodation for 'at least six of the principal learned and scientific societies who, by past usage, have acquired claims to be lodged at public expense'. This use of the site involving the demolition of the existing Burlington House was met with strong opposition and so the plan was abandoned.



Plans of Burlington House by Banks & Barry, May 1867

New plans were drawn up by Sir James Pennethorne from 1861 to 1863, with a view to retaining the existing building and providing for the building of a National Gallery on vacant land to the north. These plans were also turned down by Parliament. Three years later, in 1866, the scheme was revised and it was proposed that the Royal Academy should have a 999 year lease of the existing house at a nominal rent, with adjoining accommodation to be built for not fewer than six learned societies. The plan was approved and the work on the foundations for the additional building and the removal of the colonnade began in 1868. These were impeccably designed in a modified form of Italianate Renaissance architecture and were quite extensive, with a frontage in Piccadilly and two wings linking them to the old house.

The accommodation arrangement for the learned societies continued until 1873, when the new buildings were ready for occupation. The Royal Society and the Chemical Society took up residence in part of the east wing with the Geological Society, which moved to Burlington House in 1874 from Somerset House along with the Royal Astronomical Society and the Society of Antiquaries. The latter two societies, together with the Linnean Society, occupied the west wing.



Burlington House c. 1870



Burlington House c. 1880



When in 1968, the Royal Society accepted the Government's offer of magnificent premises in Carlton House Terrace; the vacated space was shared out amongst the other societies. The Chemical Society and the Geological Society shared the vacated space with the British Academy which moved into Burlington House from 6 Burlington Gardens. In 1970, the British Astronomical Association moved into Burlington House, sharing the space with the Royal Astronomical Society.

In 1980, the Chemical Society, the Royal Institute of Chemistry, the Society for Analytical Chemistry and the Faraday Society came together to form the Royal Society of Chemistry. When the British Academy moved to another home in 1982, the Royal Society of Chemistry and the Geological Society took up the additional space. The Royal Society of Chemistry now occupies most of the east wing. The Royal Astronomical Society and the Society of Antiquaries are opposite on the west wing, while the Geological and Linnean Societies overlook Piccadilly.

The Annenberg Courtyard (2015)

The last major change to the exterior of Burlington House came in 2000 when the courtyard was re-laid. Designed by Sir Michael Hopkins, it used five distinctive granites and added fountains to produce an ambience conducive to reflection and contemplation away from the busy streets of London's West End. Dedicated by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II on 22 May 2002, it was named the Annenberg Courtyard after its principal benefactors, the former American Ambassador, Walter Annenberg and his wife, Leonore. The design drew upon the Renaissance precedent of a cordonata ramp, originally placed in front of a palazzo for horses. Arranged around the statue of Sir Joshua Reynolds, founder and first president of the Royal Academy, the 17 water jet fountains and 11 ground-level lights were laid out to reflect the pattern of the planets in relation to the stars and constellations over London at the birth of Reynolds on 16th July 1723.

Also in 2000, the government attempted to register the societies' occupancy at Burlington House as 'tenants at will'. Legal advice was sought and it was felt that this would be significantly disadvantageous to the societies' occupation. The Government also started to raise the issue of the societies paying rent for their accommodation and paying towards the upkeep of the external fabric of the building. Up until this point, the societies all occupied Burlington House on a rent-free basis and were only responsible for the upkeep of the internal fabric of their accommodation. There was no formal paperwork in place for any of the societies whose occupations had been granted historically on a 'grace and favour' basis at the request of the monarch.

Although the Royal Society of Chemistry had started refurbishment and restoration work in 1998, the other societies had not undertaken any major refurbishment as they did not enjoy the same financial status. They felt that, before they could consider spending money on major works, the societies' occupational status at Burlington House needed to be definitively clarified. A court case was held in February 2004 and after 20 days, both sides were ordered to try and reach an amicable solution through mediation. Mediation was successful and leases were granted for a period of 10 years, the landlord was then to grant further leases for 10 year terms up to a maximum term of 80 years.

Whatever the future may hold for each of its present occupants, it is to be hoped that Burlington House will survive in its existing form, and with its own distinctive architectural qualities carefully preserved, for a very long time to come.



Burlington House on Piccadilly (2013)

Refurbishing the Royal Society of Chemistry

Having had rooms in various parts of Burlington House since 1873, the Royal Society of Chemistry (or Chemical Society, as it was known until 1980) settled into its current home in 1967. The space taken up in the East Wing had been left vacant when the Royal Society moved to Carlton House Terrace.

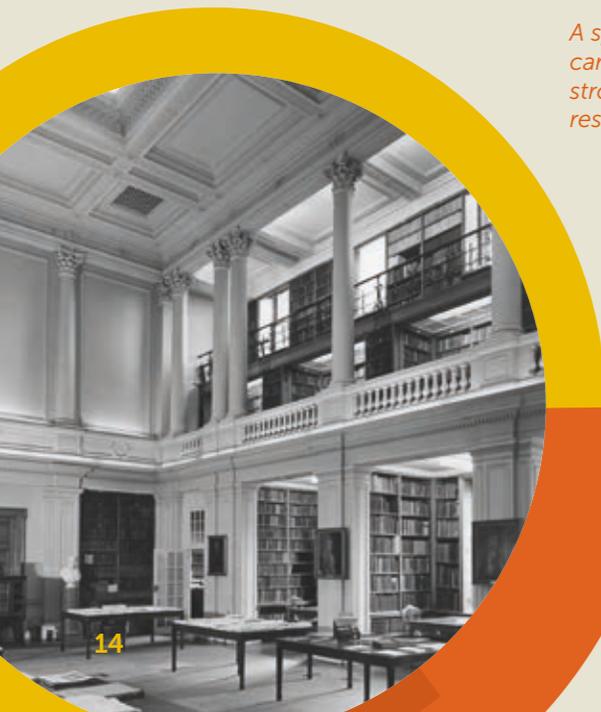
In readiness for the occupation of its new premises, the Chemical Society embarked on a programme of major refurbishment in July 1967 which was virtually completed by August 1968. The work included the conversion of the library, which previously had extended through two storeys, by introducing a new floor at second floor level that provided an additional 2400 sq. ft. of office space. A new lift was also installed.

John Pinckheard, architect for the alterations at Burlington House in 1968 wrote:

"Access to the gallery on the east side is by a new staircase and to that on the west by the original cast iron spiral stair.

...the new floor was introduced, lowering the library ceiling over the central area to about 19ft and providing space for new offices above. In order to disturb the character of the room as little as possible the new ceiling was designed to give the effect of a light canopy suspended within the original space...

A specially designed hand-woven carpet 20 feet by 40 feet provides a strong colour accent in the otherwise restrained decorative scheme."



The Royal Society Library (until 1967)

In addition to these changes, two stained glass windows were commissioned by the Society from renowned stained glass artist, Lawrence Lee. The windows were designed as a memorial to Sir Cyril Hinshelwood and depict abstract visions of chemistry past and future.

Although, at the time, landlord's consent was secured for these changes, in 1968 there were no stringent rules in place relating to such drastic changes to the fabric of an important, historic building. Burlington House was listed as a Grade II building on 5 February 1970 and so changes such as those made a few years previously would then since not be permitted.

For the Royal Society of Chemistry, 1998 saw the commencement of the first major programme of refurbishment since the late 1960's, this was triggered by the findings of the government's first Quadrennial Report on the property in 1993. The purpose of the Quadrennial Report is to establish, through visual inspection, the general condition of all parts of the building; the progress made since previous reports and to identify requirements for future works and repairs.



Stained Glass Window by Lawrence Lee

Major refurbishment works continued in 2008 across the first floor. The majority of the works being undertaken in the Library: a new bridge was installed to link the east and west Galleries; the Victorian cast-iron spiral staircase was moved from the north to the south end to accommodate the new bridge; the long-room to the east of the Library was gutted; a staircase leading up to the new Member's Room was installed.



*The Royal Society of Chemistry Library
(1967-2008)*



*The Royal Society of Chemistry Library
(from 2009)*

The Science Room



*The Lecture Theatre of the Royal Society
(1939)
© Royal Society Library*



*The Science Room
(2012)*

The Council Room



The Council Room (1969)



The Council Room (2012)



The Council Room (1980s)

The Hinshelwood Room



The Hinshelwood Room (2012)



The Duke of York, Colin Eaborn, H.M.
The Queen & Ronald Nyholm in the
Hinshelwood Room (1969)



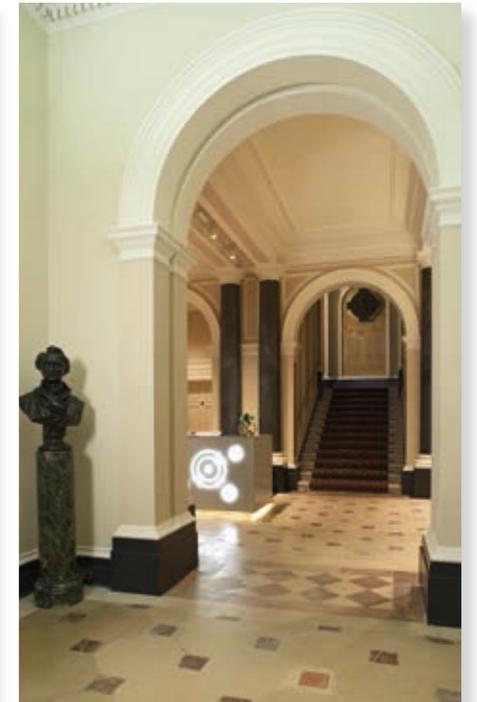
The Hinshelwood Room (1991)

Reception

In 2010, the ground floor underwent a programme of extensive works, which included a complete overhaul of the reception and waiting areas. The original stone flooring was reinstated and the reception desk was moved and redesigned along with a new waiting area. Further along the ground floor, the visitor toilet facilities were significantly modernised & expanded and state-of-the-art audio-visual equipment was installed in the meeting rooms.



Reception (1990s)



Reception (2012)



Royal Society of Chemistry
www.rsc.org

Registered charity number: 207890
© Royal Society of Chemistry 2015

Thomas Graham House
Science Park, Milton Road
Cambridge, CB4 0WF, UK

T +44 (0)1223 420066

Burlington House
Piccadilly, London
W1J 0BA, UK

T +44 (0)20 7437 8656

International Offices

São Paulo, Brazil
Beijing, China
Shanghai, China
Berlin, Germany

Bangalore, India
Tokyo, Japan
Philadelphia, USA
Washington, USA