

17 - Barker's Store, High Street Kensington, W8.

Date: 1933

Architect: B George

Sculptor: unknown

Sculptures. There are three groups, each occupying different parts of the building **[no illustrations]:**

A - A series of four large incised low reliefs, carved into the face of the stone uprights above the main entrances from the High Street:

1. Over W entrance, l.h. side, showing (top to bottom): airship in clouds, barge, streamlined bus, cascade of interlocking items from the store (including tennis rackets, cricket bat, sofa, umbrella, boots, standard lamp and other household items).

2. Over W entrance, r.h. side, showing (top to bottom): aeroplane in clouds, steamship with billowing smoke, railway engine with billowing smoke and telegraph pole, cascade of interlocking store items (including various fruit and vegetables, slippers, teapot, gloves, hat, drums, plates, etc).

3. Over E entrance, l.h. side, showing (top to bottom): delta-wing aircraft, cargo ship with waves & smoke & circling birds, streamlined bus with factory behind, cascade of store items (including radio, spade, hammer, kettle, dress, shirt, table, hat, scissors, etc).

4. Over E entrance, r.h. side, showing (top to bottom): aeroplane, cargo ship with waves & smoke & birds, streamlined railway engine with mountain behind, cascade of toys from the store (including engine, racing car, toy soldier, teddy bear, Indian headdress, sailing ship, top, cannon, etc).

B - Eight shallowly-incised relief panels along the front of the building a little above head height, depicting elegant women in various poses, the designs in part painted with gold (?)leaf. These comprise (E to W):

- 1 - Woman with flowing veil and (?)wedding bells,
- 2 - woman's head in profile, with flowers,
- 3 - woman with high collar and purse,
- 4 - woman with two dogs,
- 5 - woman with various items of toiletry, with curtain behind,
- 6 - woman with hat and long hair, with peacock and flowers,
- 7 - woman holding cigarette with musical instruments,
- 8 - woman lounging in boat with foliage, lilies and ducks.

C - Small cast bronze relief panels showing various items from the store, set in long panels with abstract relief decoration. These form part of the articulation of the large window openings which run nearly the height of the building. There are five panels to each window opening, on all three sides of the building. Subjects (many of them repeated) include: groups of glass/ceramic vessels, cricket pads, boxing gloves, long gloves, tennis rackets, table lamp, high-heeled shoes, carafe, fishes, turkey, ?thistle, pair of rabbits, open umbrella and others.

The building is a large Modernist structure built on a curve facing the street. Its main elements are the two towers set above the main entrances, with the spaces in between occupied by large multi-storied windows articulated by relatively modest uprights of Portland stone, and capped by three receding horizontally-arranged storeys. Pevsner and Cherry describe it as blending the "traditional Department Store formula with some novel features in the spirit of French Art Deco" (1991: 501). This is in my opinion one of the more interesting Modernist buildings in London.

The sculptural components to this highly articulated and well balanced structure are however almost incidental to the overall design of the building - unlike those on the Derry and Toms building next door to the W, with which it stands, even though by the same architect, in complete contrast. The incised nature of the reliefs on the facade, and the

addition of the gold (?)leaf decoration, give the sculptures the air of illustrations out of a contemporary fashion magazine illustrating scenes a la mode. The incised reliefs above the doorways depict two different aspects of everyday life: scenes of various forms of transport (in a very Modernist and semi-abstract style), and compositions illustrating goods purchaseable at the store - the two not obviously connected. This series is only visible from across the road. Together they conjure up the feeling of the pace of contemporary life, and of the 'shopping experience'. The small panels in the windows give the same message of the availability of goods, and are again somewhat incidental as architectonic elements in the design of the window openings. These are again only discernible with difficulty from the far side of the street.

Source: None available.
