TALL BUILDINGS

Aspects of their Development and Character in England

by

Elain Harwood, Susie Barson and Emily Cole

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Towers are much the big thing in both British architecture and planning at the moment. Already, there are proposals on the table for any number of breathtaking schemes which would result in a fresh rash of tall buildings soaring over the existing rooftops in England's greater towns and cities. Everywhere one looks, further proposals are coming forward in numbers unparalleled since the 1960s. London is inevitably the centre of the developer's ambition. Here, in the always frenzied atmosphere generated by high finance, where a competitive edge over other European and world cities is put forward as a key argument, architects are busy jostling for favouritism. Drawing boards (or rather their modern computer counterparts) groan with the weight of ever more staggering designs, which — if realized — would ensure their creator's immortality on the London skyline. But it is not just the capital which is subject to the pressure of the current craze. Every aspiring English town seems to want its tower. Regional image and pride are at stake: what is good for London, of course, is seen by regional authorities as good for them. Small wonder then that tall buildings are under serious consideration in, for example, Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, and Reading. It does not stop there — even Ramsgate is after its tower.

CURRENT DEBATE

There is no denying the glamour and seductiveness of tall buildings. For architects at the pinnacle of their profession, the chance of producing that world-class skyscraper has to be the ultimate ambition. Prize-winning designer Will Alsop, for example, is clearly a great fan of towers. They 'give a very metropolitan feeling, they give excitement', he says. For him, 'London is an extraordinary city, but if it is going to maintain itself as a world city it's got to move in that direction'.[1] No less enthusiastic is Daniel Rochard, who argues that much of the dismal press given to tower blocks in the past is the result of 'sloppy construction and civic corruption rather than bad design'. 'How dull cities would be', he goes on, 'if they had one flat roofline with no landmarks, a kind of suburbia, suburbia, suburbia'.[2] Lord Rogers of Riverside, arch propagandist of tall buildings in London, and Mayor Ken Livingstone's architectural adviser, is agog with those who dare to exercise caution in the matter. He describes the current London skyline as 'unbelievably boring', mockingly suggesting that if our ancestors had taken the same attitude to new buildings as those who now resist the march of skyscrapers, 'we would never have moved out of caves'.[3]

Mayor Livingstone is clearly won over by the argument. He is a formidable champion of moves for dramatic changes to the capital's skyline. Commenting on the recent consultation paper issued by English Heritage and the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE), *Guidance on Tall Buildings*,[4] Mr Livingstone said: 'I am disappointed that there was not more acknowledgement of

1 Will Alsop talking to Maev Kennedy, *The Guardian* (13 June 2001), 3.

2 A viewpoint published in *The Daily Telegraph* (25 August 2001), P1–2.

3 Remarks reported by Simon Jenkins in the *Evening Standard* (28 November 2001), 13; Richard Morrison in *The Times 2* (28 November 2001), 4.

4 EH and CABE 2001.

the positive role tall buildings can play in cities, adding to their identity, enhancing the overall panorama and contributing towards higher density targets'.[5]

Given the clarity with which Mr Livingstone had expressed his office's intentions earlier in the year, his luke-warm reaction to any evaluation process outside the control of the Greater London Assembly is readily understood. At a speech delivered to a conference of the Royal Institute of British Architects, the mayor declared:

> 'The population of London peaked between the wars at 8 million; by 1984 it was down to 6.5 million; in fifteen years time it will be back to 8.1 million. Last time the population was this high, people walked to work and women stayed at home looking after families. Our London Plan intends to encourage increased density and allow tall buildings to solve the problem'.[6]

As for the City of London itself, its current views have been summarized by Judith Mayew, chairwoman of the Corporation's policy and resources committee. In commenting on *Guidance on Tall Buildings*, she called the English Heritage and CABE approach a gamble: 'The two things developers need most are speed and certainty. The more layers there are in the planning process, the more opinions there are and the slower and less certain it becomes. The majority of City firms are no longer British-owned. They are owned by overseas companies and it does not take much to discourage them from staying here'. She feels the brakes put on proposals for tall buildings 'will quite likely threaten London's role as the centre of the financial world'.[7] A few days afterwards, almost in defiance of the main messages on the importance of location set out in *Guidance on Tall Buildings*, Judith Mayhew wrote: '... the Corporation has identified a compact area that does not impinge on potential views, where a cluster of tall buildings can be consolidated in a way we believe will enhance, not damage, London's skyline'.[8]

Meanwhile, fervent opposition to an *escalation* in the construction of tall buildings in England's towns and cities comes from a variety of quarters. The outspoken architectural critic, Giles Worsley, harks back to the mistakes of the 1960s and 1970s, when London's leaders last thought the future lay in the skies. 'All they left', Worsley argues, 'was a shattered, ugly skyline'. And he goes on: 'skyscrapers are inescapable impositions ... sometimes exciting but usually banal. We are promised that this time round they will be beautiful. I bet they said that back in the 1960s'.[9] Challenging the City's stance, Worsley maintains that neither London nor Britain's economic success depends on towers. In his view we would do better paying greater attention to our transport and communication systems, and ensuring that cities remain agreeable places in which to live. As for image and architectural identity, Worsley suggests we listen to the acknowledged world master of skyscraper design, Renzo Piano: "Tall buildings are very often expressive of nothing — except making

5 Reported by Maev Kennedy, *The Guardian* (13 June 2001), 3.

6 The mayor's London Plan is to provide a Spatial Development Strategy for the capital. The quote from the mayor's RIBA speech is taken from an article by Lisa Freedman, entitled 'Onwards and Upwards into the Future', *The Daily Telegraph* (25 August 2001), P7.

7 Comments in an interview with Maev Kennedy, *The Guardian* (13 June 2001), 3.

8 *Evening Standard* (20 June 2001).

9 Viewpoint published in *The Daily Telegraph* (25 August 2001), P1–2.

money".[10]

For the campaign group, SAVE Britain's Heritage, at the root of the current problem lies 'the utter confusion in government guidance on tall buildings'. As the group says: 'There is no overall policy which governs where, how large or how high these mega-tall buildings should be. Instead there is a raft of other policies that relate to tall buildings but fail to deal directly with the issues'.[11] Noting that Mayor Livingstone appeared to tone down his rhetoric after the tragic events in New York on 11 September, SAVE remains critical of his plans to allow the construction of ten or fifteen more new towers over the next decade. They will leave 'an indelible and unwanted scar in the historic fabric of London', the group contests. SAVE is cautious, too, of a potential free-for-all among boroughs, each one perhaps determined to secure its own 'virility symbol'![12]

Writing just nine days after the New York 'World Trade Center' disaster, Simon Jenkins was uncompromising in his criticism of the plans cherished by Mr Livingstone and his architectural advisor, Lord Rogers. 'It is clearly madness now', Jenkins pointed out, 'to be erecting "icon" towers so lightweight as to be vulnerable to fire and so high as to be impossible to evacuate at speed'.[13] Of the developer who wishes to erect a 1,000 feet (305m) 'shard of glass' over London Bridge Station, Jenkins appeared equally enraged: 'He must be mad', he said. But it is much more than the safety element which bothers this well-known columnist and architectural writer. 'There is not one tower in London that "marries" well with its surrounding streets', Jenkins concludes: 'All are enemies of neighbourhood vitality and kill their environs. These buildings are not just sitting targets for a lunatic. They are bad planning'.[14]

Prince Charles has also entered the debate, backing the lobby which wishes to save London from a wave of 'brutalist' skyscrapers. In particular, Charles has opposed existing plans for office development on the site of the former Shoreditch station, destroyed by fire in 1964. The City is keen to demolish the old brick structure, making way for a £1 billion complex which includes tower blocks rising to more than thirty storeys. The prince would prefer it to become an opportunity for London to reinvent urban architecture on a more humane scale. For David Lunts, chief executive of the Prince's Foundation, it is a question of 'who is the City for, and should it be a gated enclave?'.[15] Eric Reynolds, chief executive of Urban Space Management, which leases part of the site, feels: 'We are at a point in our history where we have never been richer or more technically capable. This site should serve as a bridge between the City and the East End, yet if the City presses ahead we will end up with a giant glass cliff next to Brick Lane, holding a mirror to people who will never share in its wealth'.[16]

10 Ibid., P2.

11 Save Britain's Heritage, *Newsletter* (October 2001), 2.

12 Ibid., 2, 8. In the same copy of the *Newsletter*, the group sets out its nine-point stance on tall buildings in London.

13 Simon Jenkins in the *Evening Standard* (20 September 2001), 13.

14 Ibid., 13. Lord Rogers brushes off concerns about the terrorist threat to tall buildings, pointing out that — if there is a next time — it might equally be a gas attack on the Tube. However, Simon Jenkins sees no reason why this should blind us to the inherent dangers in building high.

15 A report by Nicholas Hellen in *The Sunday Times* (7 October 2001), 25.

16 Ibid., 25.

Finally there is English Heritage, which — as the national body charged with the conservation and enhancement of the historic environment — has an important role to play in evaluating all tall building projects. By their very nature, of course, such developments are inevitably of more than local significance. And it is precisely for this reason that in the capital, for example, despite occasional press suggestions to the contrary, English Heritage has consistently argued for a coherent London-wide policy on tall buildings, one which gives due precedence to the all-important protection of strategic historic views. Hence, in a recent response to Judith Mayew's challenge that the City Corporation had an ideal area for a cluster of tall buildings in mind,[17] Philip Davies enquired in a letter published in the same newspaper: 'Judith Mayhew talks of scaremongering about the future skyline of the City of London. She states that the Corporation of London has identified a compact area of the City where a cluster of tall buildings can be consolidated ... Where is this area? Perhaps she would reassure the people of London by publishing a plan of the area and her own panorama showing how the London skyline will look if such a cluster of tall buildings goes ahead; then we can all form our own view, before any irrevocable decisions are made'.[18]

All in all, the press has had something of a field day over the past twelve months or so, reporting on the apparent rooted stance taken up by the two lobbies. Public perception might be that of a polarized debate over the future role of tall buildings in the ever-changing shape of our cities. Nowhere has the battleline been more keenly fought than in the public inquiry into the Heron Corporation's plans to build a thirty-seven-storey tower of 600 feet (183m) at Bishopsgate, in the heart of the City of London.[19] Though the resolve of investors and occupiers may have waivered momentarily in the wake of 11 September, Gerald Ronson's development group is determined to push forward with this scheme. It has been estimated that the proceedings may cost up to £10 million.[20] As the press tells us, there is after all a great deal at stake: the Heron Tower is effectively the first in a chain of dominoes. If the inspector in charge of the inquiry, Mr Neil Holt, is persuaded by the arguments against the siting of the tower, then developers, architects, and the City authorities are concerned that the decision will inevitably lead to the tumbling of the entire chain. If, on the other hand, the sound arguments from the conservationists fail, the floodgates may be opened.

Before proceeding, it is as well to rehearse English Heritage's basic objections to this particular London planning scheme, clearly set out by Philip Davies in his proof of evidence to the public inquiry:

> 'Our chief reason is the adverse effect which the proposed new building would have on the setting of St Paul's Cathedral in world-famous views from Waterloo Bridge and the nearby River Terrace of Somerset House, but we are also objecting to the adverse local impacts on the adjacent Middlesex Street Conservation Area and the grade II* listed church of St Botolph's, Bishopsgate. We also believe that

17 Above, p. 5.

18 Letter published in the *Evening Standard*. No response has yet been forthcoming.

19 The inquiry opened on 22 October, with the final day of public hearings held on 29 November. The inspector's decision is expected in the spring of 2002.

20 The figure is given in a report on the inquiry by Rowan Moore in the *Evening Standard* (30 November 2001), 18.

> it would be premature to grant permission for this scheme in advance of the City Corporation's review of policies on high buildings in its U[nitary] D[evelopment] P[lan] review 2000, which is currently under consideration by the Secretary of State, and also in advance of the preparation of new London-wide strategic policies for tall buildings by the Mayor as part of his *London Plan*.[21]

In such a sensitive and delicately balanced argument, there is little merit in some of the flippant reporting of the inquiry. Likening English Heritage, the City of Westminster, and the campaign group SAVE, to a 'heritage Taliban' serves no real purpose.[22] A more sober and balanced account of the proceedings was offered by Richard Morrison in *The Times*. In concluding, he asks if 'skyscraper mania' is something Londoners really want? Unaware that anyone has asked them, Mr Morrison in any case doubts it: 'In which case the Government should stand firm against the presumptuous regiment of architects, tycoons and bankers who are so intent on bringing about the biggest change to London's skyline since the Blitz'.[23]

Policy Issues

Fundamentally, it is of course difficult to define rigorously what is and what is not a tall building across the whole of England. It is clearly the case that a ten-storey building in an otherwise chiefly two-storey neighbourhood will be thought of as tall by those affected, whereas in the heart of the City of London, or in the centre of Birmingham or Manchester, other factors have to be taken into consideration. Moreover, as we are reminded by SAVE, there is currently no single planning policy guidance note devoted to tall buildings.[24] Indeed, in any one major planning application involving a tower, it may be necessary to take into account components from a wide range of both national and regional planning policy documents.

Given such a background, it is hardly surprising that the extent to which tall building policies exist among the local authorities in England varies considerably. Occasionally, some reference might be made within an authority's unitary development plan, or perhaps in other supplementary guidance. Where policies do occur, they tend to identify geographical areas where towers are not appropriate, based on an analysis of urban form and topography. In Leeds, for example, there is recognition of the need to take into account the topography of valleys and ridges in considering proposals for the location of tall buildings. Bristol and Newcastle have unitary development plan policies to ensure that development does not harm certain views, whilst Oxford has a firm skyline policy with specific height constraints within a 1,300 feet (1,200m) radius of Carfax at the centre of the town. Birmingham, in contrast, has no specific city-wide policies for tall buildings. In any case, we must remember that almost all such policies will not have been tested before the recent wave of tower schemes. Doubtless stimulated by the current number of applications, and by the growing national debate, emerging regional and local planning policy can be expected to play much closer attention to the question

21 EH (Davies) 2001, 7.

22 Rowan Moore in the *Evening Standard* (30 November 2001), 18. In describing the groups opposing the tower as 'Defiant, if slightly bedraggled', she says the people were once compared by Mr Livingstone to the Taliban, going on to refer to the 'heritage Taliban' later in her piece.

23 Richard Morrison, 'High Anxiety', *The Times 2* (28 November 2001), 4–5. But Mr Morrison feels obliged to suggest, cynically perhaps, that 'money usually wins in the end'.

24 Above, p. 6.

of tall buildings.[25]

In London, the debate has been more intense for a rather longer period.[26] Until the mid-twentieth century, the capital's skyline remained effectively controlled by the comprehensive building Act of 1894.[27] In 1956, however, the London County Council issued guidelines entitled 'High Buildings in London'. The change in policy ushered-in through this document led to a wave of tower construction in the during the 1960s and 1970s. Canaletto's celebrated views of the City of London from the Thames, its skyline punctuated by no more than church spires and towers, commanded solely by the majestic dome of St Paul's Cathedral, had been irrevocably transformed. In the West End, too, individual office and hotel towers had sprung up, including Millbank Tower, the Hilton Hotel, and — perhaps most controversial of all — Centre Point. Other places, notably Croydon, gained clusters of office towers. Hardly anywhere escaped from tower blocks of flats. The overall pattern might be said to have culminated with the NatWest Tower, completed in 1981 — the building which set the precedent for mega-tall skyscrapers in London.

In 1986, the London Planning Advisory Committee (LPAC) was set up through the same Act which abolished the Greater London Council. Henceforth, it was to become the planning committee for the entire capital.[28] In October 1988, the LPAC issued its 'Strategic Planning Advice for London', which included a section on skylines and high buildings.[29] The document set out a policy framework for future Government guidance on towers in London, something which might be followed by the boroughs in their unitary development plans. At much the same time, building on a draft report circulated in 1987,[30] English Heritage, the Department of the Environment, and the LPAC jointly commissioned a survey from Greater London Consultants and the London Research Centre as a basis for extending strategic policy with regard to tall buildings. The final document, entitled *London's Skylines and High Buildings*, was published in 1989.[31]

The 1989 report identified thirty-four viewpoints worthy of protection across London, adding a strategic dimension to existing opinions on inappropriate locations for tall buildings.[32] The report highlighted important skylines, ridges, sightlines, visual corridors, cones, and panoramas, plotting them on to maps at various scales. The document proposed special consultation on all schemes for buildings over 130 feet (40m) in the central area and certain strategic centres, and on those over 100 feet (30m) elsewhere. It suggested that buildings of over 330 feet (100m) ought to be treated as significant departures. *London's Skylines and High Buildings* represents a landmark in the debate on tall buildings in London, one which in fact continues to provide a sound basis on which to develop current policy.

25 These points are taken from EH 2001, 4; EH and Cabe 2001.

26 For further background on English Heitage's consistent stance to policy on high buildings in London, see EH (Davies) 2001, 8–30.

27 In summary, see Weinreb and Hibbert 1993, 620–21.

28 The LPAC was abolished on 31 March 2000, its duties transferred to the Greater London Authority.

29 LPAC, 'Strategic Planning Advice for London' (1988), paragraphs 8.41–8.44.

30 In draft, the document in question is Catchpole 1987.

31 GLC and LRC 1989.

32 A map demarcating areas deemed inappropriate for tall buildings had been published in Catchpole 1987, on which Fig. 1 in this document is based.

It was, therefore, disappointing when, in 1989, the Department of the Environment stated that it only intended to designate nine strategic views (later increased to ten), of the dome of St Paul's Cathedral and the Palace of Westminster.[33] Formal designation of the ten views followed in 1991.[34]

English Heritage was disappointed with the Government's position at this time, and responded during the consultation phase thus:

> 'It is a matter of concern that, once again, the Secretary of State has failed to utilise the Guidance as a means of securing high building policies for London. English Heritage, as part of its involvement in the Local plan process, will press for the inclusion of high building policies in UDP's. We will also be looking for some attempt to define areas with differing degrees of sensitivity to high buildings ... and to set out criteria for use in assessing such proposals. At the moment, however, the consultation document does no more than provide the basic elements of a policy to protect a limited number of "views of national importance", focusing on only "two of London's most famous landmarks". In so doing, the Secretary of State has signally failed to discharge his strategic responsibilities or to show any real breadth of vision'.[35]

As it happens, tall building issues took a lower profile through the early 1990s. It was mainly the property slump in London which put matters on hold, with no major new schemes emerging between 1990 and 1996. Indeed, when, in 1994, English Heritage collaborated with the LPAC to produce a strategic document on planning, *Conservation in London*,[36] there seemed little need to emphasize the sensitivities surrounding tall buildings in the framework of the historic environment at large.

The debate on tall buildings reopened in 1996, with the proposal from Sir Norman Foster & Partners to create nothing short of a mega-tower in London. Some 1,300 feet (400m) high, it was to stand on the site of the former Baltic Exchange, at the centre of the City, and was to be known as the Millennium Tower.[37] When seen on the skyline in views from Waterloo Bridge, the Millennium Tower would have appeared just to the right of the NatWest Tower (Tower 42), though it would have been more than twice its height, undoubtedly impacting on the setting of St Paul's Cathedral in views from many different directions. English Heritage's advice to the Corporation of London was that the Millennium Tower would have an 'intrusive, dominant, and massively damaging effect' on the character of the City, and urged the authorities to refuse the application. In the event, the proposals were withdrawn in mid-1997.[38]

33 Set out in EH (Davies) 2001, 14.

34 Department of the Environment, *Strategic Guidance Note RPG3*, 'Annex A: Supplementary Guidance for London on the Protection of Strategic Views (November 1991).

35 EH (Davies) 2001, 15.

36 The aim of this particular report was 'to define strategic planning policy options for 1996 to 2010, seeking to integrate the conservation, enhancement, and positive use of London's historic environment with evolving patterns of regeneration and development': EH and LPAC 1995, 7.

37 On the site and former Baltic Exchange, see Bradley and Pevsner 1997, 592–93. The proposed height of the tower was subsequently reduced to 1,260 feet (385m).

38 Almost contemporary with the Millennium Tower proposal, in 1996 a radical scheme by the Spanish architect, Santiago Calatrava, was put forward. The scheme was for a 670 feet (204m) tower, to be created by refurbishing and increasing the height of Britannic Tower (1964–67); for which, see Bradley and Pevsner 1997, 588–89. Both English Heritage and the Royal Fine Art Commission opposed the scheme on the basis of its impact on important views, particularly in relationship to St Paul's Cathedral.

In a further drive for greater clarity on tall building issues within planning policy, two more initiatives were advanced by English Heritage in 1997. First, a conference was convened on the theme of 'Managing Change in a World City', in which tall buildings was one of the main strategic issues to be discussed.[39] Secondly, together with the Government Office for London, the Corporation of London, and the Royal Fine Art Commission, English Heritage agreed to co-sponsor a further report on tall buildings from the LPAC. English Heritage was fully supportive of the LPAC's proposal that the emerging advice should seek to provide a comprehensive policy framework, including a review of the policy for the protection of 'strategic views', which itself should be expanded to include major 'local views'.

Following exhaustive study, the report, *High Buildings and Strategic Views in London*, was issued for consultation in April 1998.[40] Among its key findings were:

> 'There is no overwhelming evidence to suggest that there is a need for a radical change in London's skyline through the addition of tall buildings in order to secure, sustain or enhance London's importance as a World City or to create a new image of London for Londoners or the world.
>
> Economic analysis confirms that very high office buildings are not required for London to maintain and enhance its World City role. There is no evidence to support arguments that London will lose jobs to other World Cities if high buildings are not developed.
>
> The message is that if a high building is proposed, its acceptability should not be justified by the submission that failure to achieve it will threaten London's role as a World City ... Clearly it is a question of whether we "want" or "desire" them'.

The report concluded:

> ' ... high buildings are part of London's skyline. The existing skyline is a positive but vulnerable asset which should not be damaged needlessly, but managed sensitively in an appropriate strategic context'.[41]

English Heritage welcomed the advice in principle, but expressed considerable disappointment that it failed to contain 'the clarity, certainty or strategic direction which are required to help guide development pressures for high buildings to specific locations'.[42] Though some of the comments from English Heritage were reflected in the final document, endorsed by Government in November 1999, there remained a lack of strategic vision.[43]

Meanwhile, in parallel with the development of the LPAC advice on towers, in January 1998 the Royal Fine Art Commission published a discussion paper on 'Tall Buildings in London', as its contribution to the development of a new policy for the

39 The others were Thames bridges, and better architecture.

40 This report was prepared by the Building Design Partnership, the London Research Centre, London Property Research and Ziona Strelitz Associates: *High Buildings and Strategic Views in London* (London 1998).

41 These points are summarized in EH (Davies) 2001, 21–23.

42 Ibid., 23.

43 For the summary of final advice emerging from the initiative, see LPAC 1999, 2–3.

capital:

> '[London] remains a capital of world renown, a leader in financial and business markets, an international cultural and political centre and a place to which both people and businesses are attracted because it has retained its sense of history and a diverse built heritage. London has achieved this success *despite* an absence of the very tall buildings which characterise many other international cities ... This essential character provides a setting in which occasional tall buildings are visually difficult to accommodate.
>
> ... "Quality" embraces a host of issues which represent the measurable criteria by which their outcome will be judged. These encompass everything from detailed design to urban planning in its broadest sense. Frequently associated with architecture and aesthetics, quality is not only about what tall buildings look like or how they fulfil the needs of those for whom they are built, although these are of course important criteria. The wider impact of tall buildings is equally relevant to the concept of quality. Consideration of a tall building in relation to its context is therefore critical ... Put simply therefore, the quality of a tall building can be assessed in relation to two basic sets of criteria: it should be both appropriate for the purpose for which it was constructed and should relate satisfactorily in design terms both to its immediate and to its wider context'.[44]

In essence, nothing has changed in the main messages of the conservationist argument since 1998. Certainly no further evidence or analysis has emerged to challenge the conclusions of the LPAC report. Indeed, the results of a MORI poll commissioned by English Heritage in 2001, representing a 'snapshot' of public opinion on tall buildings, seem to very much underline the position.[45] The principal findings include:

> 67 per cent thought it was very important that a building should fit in well with its surrounding area;
>
> 57 per cent strongly agreed that tall buildings should be restricted to certain parts of cities so that other parts can retain their character;
>
> 67 per cent did not want to see new tower blocks erected for living accommodation;
>
> 62 per cent do not want any more very tall buildings in London over the next few years;
>
> 91 per cent approve the protection of views of St Paul's Cathedral and the Palace of Westminster;
>
> 74 per cent want more landmark buildings protected.[46]

It is against this detailed background, with reference to both London and other English towns and cities, that English Heritage continues to urge the Government to issue a single Planning Policy Guidance Note on tall buildings. Such a document

44 Royal Fine Art Commission, 'Tall Buildings in London' (January 1998), paragraphs 5–6, 18–19.

45 Mr Morrison (above, p. 8) was clearly unaware of this poll when he suggested in *The Times 2* (28 November 2001) that Londoners had not yet been asked for their opinion.

46 EH 2001, 2–3; EH (Davies) 2001, 26–27.

should, once and for all, provide a clearer framework to aid the decision-making process, and reduce the risk of potential conflict. Such guidance might encourage local planning authorities:

> To carry out detailed character appraisals of the historic environment in order to identify significant strategic views of skylines, landmark buildings and areas, and their settings, together with important local views, prospects and panoramas; and to include policies for their protection in their unitary development plans;
>
> having carried out such an analysis, to identify areas appropriate, sensitive and inappropriate for tall buildings within their unitary development plans;
>
> in areas deemed appropriate, or sensitive, to tall buildings, to commission detailed urban design frameworks as part of wider area-based masterplans to ensure that tall buildings are designed as part of a coherent whole, informed by a clear vision, rather than an *ad hoc*, piecemeal, reactive manner;
>
> to ensure that proposals for tall buildings are normally accompanied by Environmental Impact Assessments;
>
> to consult with adjacent planning authorities in the preparation of such policies, and also on individual proposals which will have an impact upon them, including applications for high level communications masts, illumination or signs;
>
> to stitch back the damaged urban fabric by encouraging the removal of tall buildings which detract from views, skylines and townscapes, and their replacement by lower rise, contextual development compatible with the wider area.[47]

Evaluating Tall Building Proposals

In June 2001, English Heritage published a national consultation paper, entitled *Guidance on Tall Buildings*, issued jointly with the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE).[48] This publication sets out how both organizations propose to evaluate and deal with tall building proposals in the light of existing planning policies.

The document recognizes that cities and their skylines continue to evolve. In the right place, tall buildings may even make a positive contribution to city life. They may be notable works of architecture in their own right, as shown by the listing of several post-war examples.[49] Individually, or in groups, tall buildings undoubtedly affect the image of the city as a whole. In the right place, it is argued they can serve as beacons of regeneration. The design and construction of innovative towers might also serve to push forward engineering and environmental technology.

However, by virtue of their size and prominence, *Guidance on Tall Buildings* notes that they can also harm the qualities that people value about a place. In the past, where tall buildings have proved unpopular, this has generally been for specific

47 EH 2001, 7.

48 EH and CABE 2001.

49 In all, six office towers are listed, seven residential ones (with the Barbican featuring as one item), and two university tall buildings: information from Elain Harwood.

rather than abstract or general reasons. One of the principal failings is that many were designed with a lack of appreciation or understanding of the context in which they were to sit. There have been too many examples which have been unsuitably sited, poorly designed and detailed, badly built or incompetently managed.

Apart from existing planning policy, the consultation document points out that proposals for tall buildings will be assessed against nine criteria.[50] For English Heritage (as distinct from CABE), the overriding consideration will be:

> '... whether the location is suitable for a tall building in terms of its effect on the historic environment at a city-wide as well as a local level. If not, then no tall building will be acceptable, however good the design. Only if it can be demonstrated that the location and context are appropriate will other factors including design quality be addressed'.[51]

Some of the immediate reaction to *Guidance on Tall Buildings* was reported in the press at the time of its launch,[52] but the results of the consultation will be fully assessed and published in due course.

THE PRESENT DOCUMENT

The present document presents an historical perspective on tall buildings in England. Commissioned by Philip Davies, director of English Heritage's London Region, it seeks to enhance understanding of the development sequence, both in London and the regions, and to explore issues surrounding some of the most prominent, even 'iconic', historic proposals. In part one, we are guided through the changes in the planning legislation, which — along with the essential technological advances — made building high feasible. There is also a critique of the 'new buildings' from the mid-1950s to late 1970s. We are next presented with a incisive overview of tall building development in the provincial cities, with particular attention given to Coventry, Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester, Nottingham, Newcastle, Bristol, the New Towns, and that 'Dallas' of Hampshire, Basingstoke. Parts two and three include historical accounts and critiques of a selection of the key tall buildings, focussing upon London, Manchester, Birmingham and Bristol. The selection includes examples that, at the time of their construction, were highly significant for a variety of reasons — their unprecedented height for instance, or their controversial location, or innovative or pioneering building techniques. In all cases, however, these buildings created mixed feelings of support, public outrage, comment, and debate.

Not every significant tall building has been included. Within the date range, many are from the 1960s, a time of experiment. These early buildings forced both professionals and the general public to consider the impact of future high buildings. And, of course, hindsight and reassessment of past buildings can help inform decisions which affect their future.

We might remember, too, that the content is concerned with proposals which came

50 Ibid., paragraph 5.7.

51 Ibid., paragraph 5.8.

52 Above, pp. 4–5. Report in *The Guardian* (13 June 2001), 3.

to fruition. For every scheme winning through, however controversial it may have been at the time, there was at least another which had to be abandoned in cloud of press and public dissatisfaction.[53] Nothing is said, for example, of the late 1960s plans for Piccadilly Circus. A radical redevelopment was proposed, based on guiding principles laid down by the Greater London Council and Westminster City Council, in which pedestrian and traffic flows might be vertically segregated. The scheme was to have included a 435 feet (132m) tower by Dennis Lennon & Partners, clad in bronze glass, to include shops, offices, restaurants, a cinema and theatre. Such was the unpopularity of the whole thing, the idea was dropped by 1972.[54] Similarly, in 1968, in anticipation of the market's move to Lambeth, a large-scale development was planned for Covent Garden. The draft plan for this enormous scheme made mention of 'high buildings location policy', to be used to 'heighten dramatic situations and episodes, create landmarks and provide contrast'. After years of negotiation and argument, the GLC finally abandoned all ideas for the project in 1976.[55] Given the subsequent success of Covent Garden, few might disagree with the decision.

Implicit within many of the accounts are those issues which are the concern of both English Heritage and CABE. In terms of location, we encounter the effect on the setting of listed buildings, and impact on conservation areas and World Heritage Sites. Issues of quality are also broached, not just in design, detail, materials, but also associated artwork, such as sculpture, murals, interior fixtures and fittings.

Finally, a word or two on organization. The introductory overviews on London and the regions have been prepared by Elain Harwood of the Listing Team, English Heritage's leading post-war specialist. The work is, in part, a spin-off of a book she is currently preparing on post-war architecture in England. The specific accounts of buildings are the work of Susie Barson and Emily Cole, of the Historical Analysis & Research Team. The material has been drawn together within the latter team.

Throughout, reference to specific bibliographical material is given as footnotes, notably comments and reviews quoted from the press and professional journals. Books and articles of a more general nature are drawn together in a bibliography at the end, with the author and date cited where relevant in the footnotes.

It is envisaged that, occasionally, further buildings might be covered in the individual review and critique sections. The report may, therefore, be updated from time to time.

53 The following paragraph is based on rapid reviews by Emily Cole.

54 For some account of matters, see: 'Piccadilly Dally', *The Architects' Journal*, 148 (10 July 1968), 33–35; City of Westminster, *The Future of Piccadilly Circus* (Public Consultation Paper, 1972); Greater London Council, *Piccadilly Circus: From Controversy to Reconstruction* (London 1980).

55 See: 'After the Market', *The Architects' Journal*, 148 (6 November 1968), 1037–41; GLC, Westminster City Council, Camden Borough Council, *Covent Garden's Moving: Covent Garden Draft Area Plan* (1968).

PART ONE

THE DEVELOPMENT OF TALL BUILDINGS IN ENGLAND

DEVELOPMENT IN LONDON

INTRODUCTION

Office building was not a great issue at the end of war, but within ten years it had become one of the most important, for architects, planners and critics alike. In 1943–44 plans were made for the rebuilding of London, which zoned major office development in its traditional areas in the City and West End. But with an over-valued pound, and shortages of building materials and labour, the Government was forced to control development by Building Licences until November 1954. In the intervening decade little was built save for schools, housing and for industry. The impetus to build high consequently grew out of demands for public housing and for mixed urban redevelopment, not initially from the desire for new offices.

After 1954 the pressure for new offices mounted and the situation changed. The intervening decade did, however, provide an opportunity for British engineers and builders to perfect the techniques of steel welding and concrete pre-stressing that were essential for tall buildings to brace themselves against the stresses of wind movement, and to withstand their great weight. Indeed, in areas such as pre-casting and glass cladding, Britain rapidly progressed to an international standing. By 1956 the old height restrictions imposed by the London County Council (LCC), and its predecessors in the nineteenth century, seemed to create more problems than they solved, and while they were not actually repealed, it became easier to obtain waivers, providing certain conditions were reached. The result was a flood of new office buildings, including some very prominent examples over 300 feet (91m) high, until in 1964 George Brown imposed a ban on new office building in London to encourage decentralization and put an end to speculative development. The speculators turned their attention to London's shortage of hotels instead, but the pace of change to London's historic skyline slackened after this time.

POST-WAR PLANS FOR LONDON

London has had an effective system of building controls since 1667.[1] These have determined the construction, external ornament and volume of a building, and the width of streets, largely to ensure against fires. The *Metropolitan Building Act* of 1844 first controlled building height, and in 1862 the maximum height was established at 90 feet (27.4m). More rigid controls were imposed by the 1894 Act following the construction in 1873–89 of Queen Anne's Mansions, at 130 feet (39.6m) the first building to threaten London's skyline of spires and chimneys.[2] The 1894 Act imposed an 80 feet (24.4m) height restriction, with an extra couple of storeys permitted in the roof. The result was the high roof and dormers found throughout Edwardian rebuilding schemes, from the small commercial schemes of Beresford Pite in Marylebone to the otherwise classical façades of Regent Street,[3] and they are one of central London's most distinctive features. In 1939 the Act

1 For a summary of London building regulations, see Weinreb and Hibbert 1993, 619–21.

2 This development at Broadway, Westminster, was demolished in 1971. In the words of Harold Clunn, it was 'for real ugliness unsurpassed by any other great building in all London': Weinreb and Hibbert 1993, 646.

3 For which, see Pevsner 1973, 638–40.

confirmed the total height for central London buildings at 100 feet (30m), and established that for surrounding areas at 60 feet (18.3m). Since firemens' ladders reached 80 feet (24.4m), a cornice at that level was practical as well as logical.[4] But the 1932 and 1939 Acts did begin to recognize that changes were occurring in building construction, for example with the availability of reinforced concrete, and in fire fighting methods. A little more flexibility was allowed, which brought London more into line with common practice elsewhere in Britain and abroad, for example in allowing flat slab concrete construction.

The LCC always had limited controls over the City of London. There the City Engineer, F. J. Forty, produced an independent report, *Reconstruction in the City of London* (1944), which proposed a sequence of blocks to the old height standards and a formal ring road round its northern edge. A revised plan was prepared by Charles Holden and William Holford in 1947, and published in 1951 as *The City of London: A Record of Destruction and Survival.* This proposed higher buildings for the eastern part of the City, but determined that redevelopment around St Paul's should be relatively low and consistent in style. Sketches published in *The Builder* show a series of large blocks set against well-known surviving buildings. Most of the new buildings are shown in a Scandinavian idiom with deep eaves, but those around St Paul's are indicated using a blocky brick classicism with high stone podiums, cornices and set-backs — exactly the style that was subsequently to be so derided by architects and planners alike.[5]

Proposals for a more structured pattern of office building in the LCC area began with the *County of London Plan*, by J. H. Forshaw and Sir Patrick Abercrombie, published in 1943. Its chapter on 'Use, Density and Height Zoning' recognized that developers were already building to the maximum permitted heights, and suggested that a more flexible system might be less repetitive. The *County of London Plan* emphasized the growth of London as a series of villages, with focal points, and suggested while overall buildings ought to be lower in height there were opportunities for much taller buildings — sometimes at key points in the suburbs as well as in the central area. Forshaw and Abercrombie were concerned to protect London squares and views of historic buildings.[6] The building of the nine-storey Faraday House in Queen Victoria Street in 1932–33,[7] as the GPO's main international telephone exchange, obstructing views of St Paul's from across the river, had led to the protection of the most important London vistas from 1937 onwards. This concept, agreed by the City of London and LCC, was a bedrock in post-war planning.

Forshaw and Abercrombie's thoughts on the height of buildings were not incorporated in the LCC's formal Development Plan, published in 1951. The Plan's primary concern is with the infrastructure of housing, industry and open space, and planning standards are left to a discussion of controls by 'Plot Ratio' and a

4 Arthur Ling, 'The City Skyline', in *Architects' Journal*, 119, no.3079 (4 March 1954), 275; G. A. Atkinson, 'High Buildings in Britain: Some Historical Aspects', BRE Current Paper 24/75 (March 1975).

5 *The Builder*, 1572, no.5441 (30 May 1947), especially pp.524–27.

6 LCC 1943, 116–20.

7 By A. R. Myers for the Office of Works, for which see Bradley and Pevsner 1997, 343.

'Daylighting Code'. Plot ratio, developed with William Holford as consultant, was seen as a simple way of calculating the bulk of a building, relative to its floor plate, without implying the use of any particular architectural style, and was in line with the schedules of the 1947 *Town and Country Planning Act*, which were more permissive than previous LCC regulations. The City and West End could be zoned at 5:1, i.e. a building could be permitted if its floor area did not exceed five times the total building site, with 5.5:1 permitted in a small area around and east of the Bank. The rest of central London, including the area of the Inns of Court, was zoned at 3.5:1, with 2:1 for the surrounding area. Special allowances were made for bank vaults, underground car parking and electricity substations, and a loophole enabled many architects and developers to get an extra 10 per cent. Those architects who knew how to get the maximum plot ratio out of a site were best placed to secure large commercial commissions. George Marsh, the partner of Richard Seifert (1910–2001) responsible for designing Centre Point, recalled how Seifert would keep a client talking in the upstairs office unaware of a connection to the downstairs office, where his assistants would hurriedly find plans of the site and calculate the plot ratio.[8] 'The trouble with Seifert', a member of the LCC Town Planning Committee told Oliver Marriott, 'was that he knew some of the regulations far better than the LCC itself. Every now and then we had to bring in clauses to stop up the loopholes exposed by Seifert. We called them Seifert clauses'.[9] Similarly Eros House, Catford, was designed by Rodney Gordon of Owen Luder and Partners with projecting bays because the plot ratio could not be accurately determined while the theatre on the site still stood.[10] Marriott suggests that understanding of the regulations was a key factor in the concentration of speculative office building in the hands of some ten efficient operators.[11] Plot ratio was significant in providing a mechanism by which canny architects could break through the height limit, by offering set backs or open space at ground level in return for extra floors. It was a particularly effective stratagem when used in conjunction with the Daylighting Code.

The Daylight Code was an experiment introduced by the LCC in June 1949 at the insistence of the Ministry of Town and Country Planning, together with a system of angular lines drawn in relation to the external walls beyond which no part of the building might project. This was a response to the dark courtyards and narrow alleys particularly prevalent in the City, and concern for the nation's eyesight raised by the nascent National Health Service. Only from *c.* 1955 did efficient artificial striplighting begin to become available. Nevertheless, there was an obvious conclusion that tall blocks generously spaced could provide better light and air for their occupants than low blocks pushed close together.

Technical Advances

The interim provided an opportunity for advances in modern techniques. Steel roof sheeting was first codified in 1936, the year after the first welded steel frames in Britain were completed, at the De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill, and Simpson's, Piccadilly, both engineered by the émigré, Felix Samuely. Ove Arup, who had come

8 Information from George Marsh, 10 April 1998.

9 Quoted in Marriott 1967, 32.

10 Information from Rodney Gordon. For Eros House, Cherry and Pevsner 1983, 427.

11 Marriott 1967, 32.

to Britain in 1923 after studying in Copenhagen and working in Hamburg, later described coming to England as 'stepping 50 years back in time'.[12]

One reason for the great increase in the scale of building in the 1950s was the development and wider availability of heavier equipment than hitherto. A tower crane exhibited at the Festival of Britian's 'Live Architecture' exhibition in 1951 was admired as a genuine novelty; by the late 1950s it was commonplace. Similarly, equipment for digging and, particularly, piling became more robust. It was widely supposed that London's feeble clay subsoil would impede tall building, yet when the equipment was available piling was no longer a problem. Some buildings, such as the Hilton Hotel, were built on rafts as an alternative, perhaps cheaper solution, and one favoured where there were underground lines or telecommunications underneath — a more insurmountable problem than simply that of reaching rock. The complicated topography of services and communications under London was the principal reason why a transmitter tower was preferred by the Post Office for its telecommunications network, and why the Post Office Tower was built as it was.

Pre-stressed concrete began to be introduced in Britain at the very end of the 1930s, but it was only in the early 1950s that the Building Research Establishment made a series of tests and began to understand its properties of greater strength and wind resistance. Welded steel and pre-stressed concrete were pre-requisites for the kind of highly-glazed framed building that were economic and relatively light-weight on London clay. This demanded new advances in cladding. The New York prototypes for this kind of building were the United Nations Building and Lever House, but the Boots D10 Factory and Peter Jones in Britain offered models,[13] and firms like Pilkingtons were well placed to handle the new requirements. In the post-war years the pioneers were the light school buildings erected by Hertfordshire County Council, using a cladding system developed by Hills of West Bromwich. In office building the first examples were Frederick Gibberd's National Dock Labour Board on the Albert Embankment, and the first offices by Gollins, Melvin and Ward in New Cavendish Street (Electrin House), both completed in 1956. A long article by Michael Brawne and Alan Craig in the *Architectural Review* in 1957 was the first to look at British achievements in the development of wall frames, mastics and gaskets. Andrew Saint suggests that the technical data supplied here, and in articles by Tom Markus that followed in the *Architects' Journal*, did much to promote the wholesale shift into curtain walling in the later 1950s.[14]

Britain's other expertise lay in the realm of precasting. The Cement and Concrete Association founded a research station at Wexham Springs in 1947 to explore, among other things, the aesthetic possibilities of concrete finishes, particularly as produced by precasting. Precasting reduced the element of risk inherent in finishing a building '*in situ*', where bad weather or poor workmanship could take their toll. Storey-height precast cladding panels were first used on a large scale at the LCC's Roehampton Lane Estate, now Alton West, where the first blocks were completed in 1958;[15] and were copied by Richard Sheppard & Partners for their large student

12 Ove Arup, 'Arup Associations', in *Architectural Review*, **166**, no. 993, 315. For Simpson's, see Pevsner 1973, 622.

13 For Peter Jones, see Caladine 2001.

14 This section is indebted to a report by Andrew Saint (February 1993), written for English Heritage's Post-War Steering Group.

15 Harwood and Saint 1991, 123–24.

blocks for Imperial College.[16] By the time that Centre Point was built, in 1961–66, Britain's cast panels could stand comparison with the best in the world.

Lift technology had also to improve markedly in the 1950s. Until the first Code O Practice was issued in 1954 Britain did not have common standards for lift design.[17] The performance of lifts was a problem that particularly concerned Margaret Willis, the LCC's sociologist, when the first high flats were occupied the same year.

The advances in services technology that made the production of very large, tall buildings possible had a second and more important consequence for office buildings. That was in the internal planning of the working environment, as large artificially lit and ventilated spaces enabled the development of open-plan and more flexible working layouts. Moreover the new imagery of concrete and steel technology can be seen in small buildings such as Hille's offices and showrooms on Albemarle Street of 1961–63 by Peter Moro,[18] of only six storeys, as well as in very large ones. In determining the success or failure of these buildings, quality of detailing and massing came quickly to be seen as more important than height alone.[19]

Building Licences

Shortages of building materials and labour at the end of the Second World War meant that building licences operated until November 1954. These prioritized the availability of materials for local authority housing and schools, for industry and agriculture. Private development was rigorously controlled. Licences were introduced in 1945; then, in August 1947, Stafford Cripps brought all private building to an end. It was reinstated a year later, but materials remained in short supply. Steel was freed from control in May 1950, only for controls to be reintroduced in December, and in February 1952 were tightened to include wire mesh used in reinforced concrete.

Building licensing and import controls were the last post-war restrictions to operate. Building controls were anathema to a Conservative Government, but the *Architects' Journal* was more worried of a possible free-for-all that might result once they were lifted.[20]

Precedents for Post-War Office Building Before 1956

The City of London lost almost a third of its building stock through bombing, leaving a shortage of six million square feet (560,000 sq m) of office space, while in the West End the shortage of premises led to the taking over of surviving dwelling houses for commercial use.

By November 1954 a number of offices had been completed. These included a few

16 Conversation with Roy Stout and Patrick Litchfield, 9 October 2001.

17 *Architects' Journal*, 119, no.3087 (29 April 1954), 527–31.

18 For which, Pevsner 1973, 631.

19 See, for example, Webb 1969, 141.

20 *Architects' Journal*, 115, no.2987 (29 May 1952), 655.

prestige offices where much-needed American dollars had secured the necessary materials and permits, for example at the Time and Life Building in New Bond Street, opened in May 1953.[21] Michael Rosenauer's building, with its external sculpture by Henry Moore and lavishly decorated interiors co-ordinated by Sir Hugh Casson and Misha Black, exemplified a preferred style of modernism that was rich in art and expressively varied in its materials. It was termed at the time 'People's Architecture', but as there was little opportunity to build in Britain the style can best be seen in competition schemes for Commonwealth and Middle Eastern countries, including offices for the Uganda Electricity Board and Doha Hospital in Qatar published in 1953. The principal surviving exception is Congress House for the Trades Union Council finally completed in 1957.[22]

The other offices to be built in the late 1940s and early 1950s were those needed by the growing number of Government departments. Under the 'Lessor Scheme' selected developers were granted building licences on condition that the blocks they erected would be then leased back to the Government for a fixed period, usually of forty years. Thirteen blocks were erected in London under this arrangement, of which the most prominent were a group in Theobalds Road for the Ministry of Defence. Another example, however, is Fortress House in Savile Row, built by J. May of Curtis Green, Son & Lloyd in 1949–50 for the Fortress Property Company of Hays Mews, W1, and now probably the best surviving example.[23] It opened in 1950 as the headquarters of the newly nationalized Central Electricity Board, was briefly the home of the Ministry of Town and Country Planning, and by February 1952 was the headquarters of the Ministry of Health. It was later the headquarters of the Civil Service Commission, until the Department of the Environment and Royal Commission on Historic Monuments arrived in 1971.

When new office building began in the City, it was again through the Lessor scheme. St Swithin's House, of 1950–52 by Gunton and Gunton, with a principal elevation of heavy Portland stone by R. W. Symonds and figure sculpture by Siegfried Charoux, is a particularly massive example.[24] A total ban on offices was lifted in 1952, but more numerous were the schemes for which planning permission was obtained and contracts let for work to begin when the licensing system was withdrawn. The *Architects' Journal* published a number of squat blocks to be built by the City of London Real Property Company Limited 'as soon as licences become available'. Designed by specialists such as Trehearne and Norman, blocks of up to eight storeys with two-storey set-backs were all designed in a stripped neo-Georgian, or to a styleless proportionate system. The *Architects' Journal* columnist, Astragal, commented that 'on individual sites in congested areas like the City, the LCC fire regulations and model bye-laws dictate so much of the architecture ... it does [sic] seem to prevent the achievement of elegance and spirit ... and of course also of exciting silhouettes'.[25] The schemes by Trehearne and Norman, Preston & Partners include more 'contemporary' detailing such as patterned stone cladding and mosaics, as seen at Clements House in Gresham Street, of 1954–57.[26] The

21 Pevsner 1973, 602–03.

22 Cherry and Pevsner 1998, 266–67.

23 Called 'self-consciously Lutyens' in Pevsner 1973, 568.

24 For which, Bradley and Pevsner 1997, 599.

25 *Architects' Journal*, **119**, no.3074 (28 January 1954), 117.

26 Bradley and Pevsner 1997, 514: '... one of the best office buildings in the City of its date'.

quality of these buildings, together with their bulk, prompted concern at the highest level. At a luncheon party at the Mansion House in January 1954, David Eccles, the Minister of Works, called for 'a co-ordinating body to save the City of London from fat and familiar, mediocre and characterless neo-Georgian architecture'.[27] Schemes such as Albert Richardson's Bracken House and Austen Hall's Bankers Clearing House, both exhibited at the 1954 Royal Academy Exhibition, were described as 'the spoliation of the City of London and the neglect of an opportunity such as has not been given to us since the Great Fire of 1966'.[28] In March 1953 a scheme for the Bank of England's site east of St Paul's by Victor Heal was rejected because to achieve the plot ratio of 5:1 it proposed a series of 140 feet (43m) towers.[29]

The few new alternatives were the designs for the National Dock Labour Board on the Albert Embankment, by Frederick Gibberd, which, when it was published in March 1954, included a taller tower to the rear. What J. R. Richards at the *Architectural Review* and Colin Boyne at the *Architects' Journal* were looking for was some sign that the tenets of the modern movement, which lent themselves to the new planning codes, would be applied to office design. The first example to receive their praise was Owen Campbell-Jones's Bucklersbury House on Queen Victoria Street, another massive building but one that used its site to break down its mass into a series of blocks that maximized daylighting, and which incorporated a variety of material and works of art in its design.[30] Sir Giles Gilbert Scott had been brought in to provide a restrained classical embellishment, which had the opposite effect to that intended when the building was initially rejected by the Royal Fine Art Commission. Instead it was built unadorned. Ian Nairn placed it first in his book on *Modern Buildings in London*, as the point 'where architecture begins ... This mass of building has a lot of storeys, a lot of windows, freedom from pointlessly applied period detail, freedom from obvious gracelessness, freedom from aesthetic megalomania. It has no virtues and no vices: it is the null point of architecture'.[31] As a reaction to so much neo-Georgian design, in 1955 Sir William Holford was brought in by Duncan Sandys, Minister of Housing and Local Government, to provide a new and acclaimed scheme to a more picturesque plan for the area immediately north of St Paul's, at Paternoster Square. The *Architectural Review* suggested that just as St Paul's had been 'a symbol of London's survival after night upon night of bombing' in the war, so the surrounding area's redevelopment should stand 'on the credit side' for peacetime gain.[32]

Building High

The first developments towards building more than eight or ten storeys came not with offices but with council flats. At the Ackroydon Estate off Wimbledon Common the LCC first experimented with ten-storey flats as a means of preserving a historic landscape attributed to Joseph Paxton. These were completed in 1954.[33]

27 *Architects' Journal*, 119, no.3073 (21 January 1954), 66, 111.

28 *Architects' Journal*, 119, no.3088 (6 May 1954).

29 *Architects Journal*, 117, no.3029 (19 March 1953), 603.

30 Pevsner 1973, 279; Bradley and Pevsner 1997, 584.

31 Nairn 1964, 1.

32 *Architectural Review*, 119, no.713 (June 1956), 295–98.

33 Cherry and Pevsner 1983, 685.

More radical still was High Paddington, an exhibition held at the Building Centre in November 1952. Designed by Sergei Kadleigh, High Paddington was a scheme for 8,000 flats in three 400 feet (122m) towers set astride the goods yards at Paddington Station, topped by schools, a church and hotel. The scheme was published as a book by the *Architect and Building News*, the LCC commissioned a report, and it led to Kadleigh, with William Whitfield and Patrick Horsbrugh, being commissioned to investigate the redevelopment of the area north of St Paul's known as the New Barbican, in 1954.[34] In 1953 Joseph Emberton completed three blocks of twelve-storey flats off Old Street for Finsbury Borough Council,[35] which at 118 feet (36m) high were the tallest in London since Queen Anne's Mansions.

There had been little money or desire to emulate the monumental skyscrapers of 1930s' Manhattan. Michael Rosenauer's *Modern Office Buildings* of 1955 looked instead at more recent models from both North and South America. Le Corbusier, Lúcio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer's Ministry of Education and Health Building at Rio de Janeiro (1936–43) suggested one new approach, a heavily profiled, fully glazed building supported on pilotis over an open ground floor. The United Nations Building, developed by Wallace K. Harrison from the proposals of an international panel in 1947–52, and Gordon Bunshaft's Lever House of 1950–52 demonstrated how tall, narrow buildings could free amenity space at ground level even in crowded Manhattan. Before then, however, the Equitable Building (now the Commonwealth Building) in Portland, Oregon, by Pietro Belluschi had shown as early as 1947–48 that a flush curtain-walled skin of coloured glass could produce a quiet, sophisticated modern design that could withstand urban pollution, while Mies van der Rohe's first apartment buildings in Lake Shore Drive (1948–51) were still more elegant. It was an architectural style that could be quietly effective without the need for expensive materials or ornament. In England, apart from his own offices for Time Life, Rosenauer's only models of modern design were Serge Chermayeff's offices for Gilbey's Gin of 1937, and offices by Maurice Bebb in Hemel Hempstead for Sir Robert McAlpine and Sons, a low building of 1951–52 that contrasted bands of brickwork with long lines of glazing.[36]

The Move to Build High: Changes in LCC Policy, 1956

If one scheme in particular prompted the LCC to change its policy on tall buildings it was a problem of its own making. In a series of deals made between 1945 and 1948, it had promised the whole of what became the Festival of Britain's 'Upstream' site to the Ministry of Works for offices and an international conference centre. When, in September 1952, after the site had been cleared, the Ministry reneged on its promise, so the LCC called its bluff and looked at other options that might give a 'livelier development' mix, as well as a better return than had been promised back in 1945. However, the only strong offer was from the Shell Petroleum Corporation. It was because Shell offered the possibility of a conference centre, as well as a prestige building at premium rates, that their offer seemed particularly attractive.[37] But to squeeze Shell's required accommodation on to the

34 *Architects' Journal*, 116, no.3014 (4 December 1952), 669; (14 October 1954), 457.

35 Cherry and Pevsner 1998, 645.

36 Pevsner 1977, 181: '... interesting, if a little mannered ... with a display of just too many unexpected motifs'.

37 London Metropolitan Archive: LCC/CL/LEA/1/18.

South Bank, along with the proposed cultural centre, could not be done without building high. Robertson and Smith, of the firm Easton, Robertson, Cusdin, Preston and Smith, had the job of fitting a very large office building and range of ancillary accommodation on to this small site. The result is remarkably like the proposals made in 1947 by Howard Robertson when he was the British representative on the committee designing the United Nations Building in New York. Robertson had recently been a president and gold medallist of the RIBA, and was currently a member of the Royal Fine Art Commission. He was thus at the forefront of the British architectural profession, and could exert considerable pressure in favour of his design. The Shell Centre comprises two ten-storey blocks either side of the railway line into Charing Cross, with attached to the 'upstream' building a twenty-six-storey tower.[38] Robertson was made to reduce the bulk of the slabs shown in his first schemes in favour of this tall tower. Originally built with strong set backs to the upper storeys, small additions have been made to infill these, further compromising its bulky profile. The building was much criticized by the architectural press both before and after its completion. The *Architects' Journal* wrote 'if hugeness were all, how impressive all this would be. It is, in fact, impressive, but depressive too'.[39]

If the LCC was to grant a 'waiver' for a scheme on its own land, it could not easily refuse similar grants to others. High buildings were clearly seen by planners and historians, as well as by architects, as a solution to the problems of bulk and daylighting. In May 1956 the LCC's Town Planning Committee finally issued new guidelines, entitled 'High Buildings in London'.

> 'With modern techniques of construction it has for some time been possible to build high; indeed the height of buildings now limited more by economics and the weight-bearing capacity of the subsoil than by purely constructional consideration. The subsoil in London is very varied but in most parts it is thought that blocks up to 300 feet [91m] high could be built without undue cost for foundations ...
>
> The effect of the Council's standards of plot ratio and daylighting control is to encourage high buildings in the form of an open spine or tower, rather than a lower, bulky type of building surrounding internal courtyards ...
>
> The Council itself has included proposals for high buildings in a number of its schemes for areas which are being comprehensively developed, for example, the plans for the South Bank area include an office building of over 300 feet [i.e. Shell], carefully sited as a vertical feature in a group of public and semi-public buildings of a general height of about 100 feet [30m]. In residential areas the Council has been building point blocks and slab blocks of eleven storeys grouped in various ways, and further schemes for higher blocks are now under consideration [the Brandon Estate, as well as developments by the City and London Boroughs]. Other areas of comprehensive redevelopment, such as Barbican, offer similar opportunities for the siting of high buildings'.

The Town Planning Committee appreciated that tall buildings cost more than low ones, because of the extra cost of foundations and providing lifts. However, it recognized that they also made possible the provision of open space at ground level, good views and freedom from smog and noise at the upper levels, and that carefully

38 Cherry and Pevsner 1983, 348–49.

39 *Architects' Journal*, **135**, no.14 (4 April 1962), 702.

sited and well designed they could contribute to the picturesque interest of the London skyline. The Council therefore offered to grant waivers if eight questions could be answered satisfactorily.

1. Whether the building will disrupt the pattern of existing development or obtrude itself on the skyline to the detriment of any existing architectural groups and landscape.

2. Whether its position has any positive visual or civic significance in relation to the town as a whole.

3. Whether the site is large enough in relation to its surroundings to allow the erection of a suitably designed base of lower buildings or the provision of open space.

4. The degree of overshadowing of the adjoining area? The extent to which the buildings would detract from the development possibilities of the adjoining area.

5. Whether the building makes a better contribution to the general character of the area than possible alternatives and whether it relates satisfactorily to any other existing or proposed high building in the vicinity.

6. The relationship of the proposed building to existing or proposed open space and to the river Thames.

7. Whether, in view of its prominence, the design and materials proposed for the building are of sufficiently high quality.

8. Whether its illumination at night could detract from London's night scene.

The Royal Fine Arts Commission agreed that each case should be considered on its merits. It led to a policy of encouraging individual high buildings within a general pattern of low building for London, at nodal points, on the river or, more controversially, adjoining its parks. It was a fulfilment of the picturesque scheme envisaged by Forshaw and Abercrombie, and one that continued their policy of 'mixed development' already well established in public housing. The policy was taken a stage further in July 1957 when plot ratios were revised to reduce the amount of office building outside the City, unless there was a residential element to the scheme, as at Centre Point. The areas that kept their 5:1 ratios were precisely those major interchanges already identified as suitable for high building. The 1956 guidance notes, and 1957 refinement of plot ratios, established a clear pattern for the picturesque integration of tall buildings within the existing West End.

In part, the new high buildings policy was a response to existing pressures, the general disappointment with the bulky ten-storey offices beginning to be produced in the City, together with real alternative proposals for the South Bank and New Barbican. But it also reflected a wider movement. The summer of 1955 had seen the publication, by the *Architectural Review*, of a special issue devoted to Ian Nairn's *Outrage*, an attack on the sweeping suburbanisation of England that prompted endorsing leaders in *The Times*, *Manchester Guardian*, *News Chronicle*, *Daily Herald*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Mirror*, and the reproduction of the issue in book

form.[40] The low densities of the New Towns, where little building had so far occurred in their town centres, attracted equal concern and unfavourable comparison with Vällingby outside Stockholm, with its ten- or twelve-storey point blocks in and around a central pedestrianised square. Meanwhile, the publication of designs for Mies van der Rohe's Seagram Building in New York, in May 1955, and lectures by Pier Luigi Nervi in October 1955 featuring his tower for Pirelli in Milan, showed what could be done elsewhere. The publication of Michael Scott's seven-storey office building and bus station brought the issue even closer to home, 'completing Dublin's first contemporary office block before London had even started to build one'.[41] By early 1956 at least two schemes had been given permission. Chamberlin, Powell & Bon had revised their scheme at Golden Lane, then in Finsbury, to incorporate a fourteen-storey block (and raised again to sixteen storeys by completion), and Andrew Renton of Basil Spence & Partners had produced a scheme for Thorn Electrical Industries comprising a sixteen-storey tower with a penthouse board room, a first-floor showroom and a conference theatre. 'Its area, shape, and position on the site were controlled by the daylight indicators operated under the LCC town planning regulations for buildings over 100feet [30m] high',[42] although work on site did not actually begin until 1957. Thorn House was to set the tone of the best new office buildings, comprising headquarters facilities with some lettable space, a set-back entrance to create new public space and the incorporation of a stylish work of modern art (by Geoffrey Clarke).[43]

The New Buildings

In engineering terms building tall offered relatively little that was new internationally; rather, what was new for Britain was already well-known in other countries. Building high involved deep boring on a scale not hitherto attempted, with complications in London not just because of the uncertainties of the clay sub-soil but also because of the large number of underground obstructions such as the 'tube' system. The Post Office Tower was designed as a direct consequence of the difficulties of laying communication cables in central London. Sir Thomas Bennett in 1960 considered that a building of 250 feet (76m) in London required foundations of at least 60 feet (18m), and complained that tall buildings required larger banks of lifts, that wind pressures and temperature losses were formidable, and servicing such a structure with heating, water, air conditions and fire precautions posed new challenges for the M and E Engineer.[44] A commercial architect like George Marsh, working for Richard Seifert, developed an unusually detailed knowledge of services.[45] Above ground the principal problem was wind bracing, particularly in very slender towers where tolerances also had to be incorporated for heat expansion. The Post Office Tower, with its technical specification for receiving high frequency radio waves, faced particular difficulties.

40 *Architects' Journal*, 122, no.3149 (7 July 1955); Nairn 1956.

41 *Architects' Journal*, 121, no.3125 (20 January 1955), 68.

42 *Architectural Review*, 119, no.709 (January 1956), 47–48.

43 Pevsner 1973, 374–75: '... one of the best office buildings of its date in England'. Also, Jones and Woodward 2000, 255. The building was renovated in 1988–90.

44 Sir Thomas Bennett, 'The Architect's Approach to Engineering in Tall Buildings', an account of a lecture given to the Royal Society of Arts and Institute of Plant Engineers on 9 December 1960, in *Town and Country Planning*, 29, no.2 (February 1961), 73.

45 The enormous (room sized) boiler in his own home was a demonstration of this.

At the Barbican, aero-dynamic shapes were adopted for the housing blocks of thirty-nine to forty-three storeys,[46] but elsewhere bracing was simply resolved by building a rigid reinforced concrete core, generally put to serve as the lift and services shaft. Centre Point was unusual in that its shape lent itself to the provision of two cores of lifts, at either end, instead of one large one.[47] External cladding was then kept as light as possible, with great consideration given to expansion joints, overall taper or entasis, and to a secure means of hanging cradles to the roof for window cleaning. This last had a great influence on cornice design. Considerations of safety, and of noise at busy road junctions, meant that tall buildings were models of modern air conditioning. The late 1950s saw all these features developed in tall buildings to a pretty common pattern, with deep basements, a central core of lifts and services, and at least one large plant floor at the top.

Few tall buildings have fine interiors. Most were wholly speculative, but where there was a dedicated corporate client for all or part of the building the board rooms at the top of the building, with their accompanying executive dining rooms, offered possibilities for outside designers. The basement or a podium level would house the main canteen for all the other staff, perhaps with a mural like that by Edward Bawden at Britannic Tower near Moorgate.[48] The Shell Centre was exceptional in having a lecture theatre that could be used as a theatre or cinema (designed by Sir Cecil Beaton and with a separate access for members of the public), and a swimming pool. New Zealand House has a complex sequence of public and consular rooms on its podium floors separated by small courtyard gardens.[49] Otherwise only the foyer provided interest, with perhaps a contrast of levels and some sculpture, as Geoffrey Clarke provided at Castrol House. Again the Shell Centre was particularly rich, with a foyer by Ernesto Roberts containing a *Horse and Rider* by Marino Marini. But the chief interest of tall buildings is that they are themselves sculpture, which has to look good when seen either from a distance or close to, yet can rarely be enjoyed as a whole.

High buildings were a product of lack of space and high land values in central London, but Bennett also detected another reason for their popularity — 'prestige'. Shell House and Thorn House are clear demonstrations of this. A few firms could even make an ostentatious display or 'swank' out of having a one- or two-storey building on a colossally expensive site.[50]

The new guidelines were pretty irrelevant for the large cleared areas found in the City. A more comprehensive plan was needed there, but only in one area was this provided for office accommodation. This was the scheme known as New Barbican, and later as South Barbican, Route 11 or London Wall.[51] Kadleigh, Whitfield & Horsbrugh had produced a scheme largely of office buildings in late 1954, with relatively low blocks nearer St Paul's rising to a twenty-seven-storey, 350 feet (107m) tower close to Moorgate. This was rejected in late 1954, and the northern area of Barbican was conceded to Chamberlin, Powell & Bon's mixed development

46 For the Barbican estate, see Bradley and Pevsner 1997, 281–84.

47 For Centre Point, Cherry and Pevsner 1998, 316; and below, no. 6.

48 Bradley and Pevsner 1997, 588–89: 395 feet (120m) high.

49 For New Zealand house, see Pevsner 1973, 588–89; and below, no. 2.

50 Bennett, op. cit., 'The Architect's Approach to Engineering in Tall Buildings' (1961), 73.

51 For the Barbican, see Bradley and Pevsner 1997, 281–86; Harwood and Saint 1991, 125–26.

proposals. Charles Glenny, Chairman of the Corporation's planning committee, considered that 'Our square mile is too small for experiments or the exploitation of modernistic art'.[52] A revised version produced in early 1955, under Leslie Martin of the London County Council and H. Anthony Mealand, Chief Planning Officer for the Corporation, comprised a line of six towers of some eighteen storeys set either side of a new road, with car parking below and pedestrian walkways above, and with lower blocks set between them, kiosks on the walkways and a larger tower, Britannic Tower, to the north near Moorgate.[53] Eventually begun in 1960, London Wall was the first example of a consistent plan being adopted for a large commercial area. Various architects were employed to design the towers, under the general guidance of Henryk Blachnicki of the City of London Planning Office, and using a standard grid with curtain walling.

Few new tall schemes emerged in 1956, save for the LCC's own housing scheme at Tidey Street in Poplar, which had a nineteen-storey tower as its centrepiece. But by 1958 curtain walled blocks of ten storeys had become part of 'an almost standardized modern style of design partly brought about by the widespread use of standard components like curtain walling, and partly by the natural process whereby a movement that starts with a number of experiments in form and evolves therefrom a number of accepted clichés, eventually crystallizes into a style'. By 1958 modernism had become the norm, no longer adventurous. Nevertheless, most new development remained below the 100 feet (30m) limit, at nine or ten storeys, such as the long redevelopment of the Strand by Trehearne & Norman, Preston & Partners begun in November 1957.

The first group of tall buildings which received permission in London form an idiosyncratic group, their distinction further advanced by being early models of light curtain walling also. Housing remained to the fore throughout 1958, with twenty-one-storey blocks approved by the LCC for sites between the Grand Union Canal and Harrow Road, and twenty-two storeys by the City of Westminster at Hide Place near Victoria.[54] Private flats also began to be built high, with approval given for a sixteen-storey block off Church Street, St Marylebone. The first office blocks were in Eastbourne Terrace, built in just nineteen months in 1957–58 by C. H. Elsom and Peter Softley. At the time the line of offices of different heights built to a common 5 feet (1.5m) grid was widely admired — 'works like a charm', said Nairn, if in part because its very simplicity betrayed no obvious sources.[55] But indifference soon replaced novelty, and one section was rebuilt in the late 1990s. Such simple curtain walling was a clear counter to Shell's expensive mixture of conservative American-skyscraper grandeur and over-wrought Scandinavian detailing. Another early curtain-walled scheme to gain approval was Castrol House, built in 1957–59, though only after its height was reduced by the Royal Fine Arts Commission so as not to dominate St Marylebone Town Hall on the other side of Marylebone Road.[56] It was 1959 which proved the break-through year, with approval given for New Zealand House and, less controversially, Millbank Tower. The Smithsons were commissioned to design a group of buildings for *The Economist*, setting back a

52 *Architects' Journal*, 120, no.3118 (2 December 1954), 665.

53 For which, see Bradley and Pevsner 1997, 588–89.

54 Pevsner 1973, 666: 212 feet (65m) high.

55 Nairn 1964, 38.

56 Cherry and Pevsner 1991, 658–59; and below, no. 1.

fourteen-storey office tower behind a four-storey bank in a small, irregular piazza. Set back from the main vista down St James's Street, but hard against the small streets behind, the group is particularly well integrated into the London building grid.[57] At the end of the year the LCC completed the eighteen-storey residential towers at its Brandon Estate, designed to be landmarks in the regeneration of South London, and construction began of Ernö Goldfinger's Alexander Fleming House at the Elephant and Castle nearby, with its highest slab also of eighteen storeys.[58]

Towers outside central London began to be built for offices as well as flats. The Empress State Building by Stone, Toms and Partners that dominates Earl's Court with its twenty-six storeys was built in 1962 with a panache that almost befitted its jokey name and whose concave 'Y'-shaped plan owes something to Marcel Breuer.[59] Down in Kingston, Richard Seifert & Partners erected their first resoundingly modern building, Tolworth Tower, built on the site of an Odeon cinema at a busy road interchange in 1962–64 and particularly notable for the acutely waisted forms of the pilotis on which the twenty-two-storey tower and low podium sit.[60] It is noticeable how these speculative suburban towers have been refurbished and remodelled as regularly — if more cheaply — as those in the heart of the City, and that only a the few of the most prestigious towers in the West End survive in anything like their original condition today.

Tall buildings eventually came also to the City itself. Following the building of London Wall, towers were constructed around the southern end of Bishopsgate and eastern part of Leadenhall Street, and many were only completed after the imposition of the 'Brown Ban'. Britannic Tower, originally by F. Milton Cashmore and Niall D. Nelson and built in 1963–67, and the Commercial Union complex by Gollins Melvin Ward & Partners of 1963–69, were perfectionists' realisations of the clean lines favoured by Mies van der Rohe and Gordon Bunshaft (of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill), and specifically of the latter's Union Carbide Building in New York.[61] Other architects adopted a more sculptural effect, most notably Richard Seifert & Partners with their tower at Drapers' Gardens of 1964–67 — its cantilevered construction audaciously expressed and well-honed cladding of concrete and mosaic.[62] The same practice's NatWest Tower (now Tower 42) was originally planned in 1959, but fell victim to the Brown Ban and only secured an Office Development Permit in 1968, the year that Seifert was appointed. Again the office accommodation is visibly cantilevered above an open ground floor, the cantilever corresponding to a comparable form in the foundations to make an 'hourglass' shaped construction of great technical complexity for so tall a building (fifty-two storeys).[63] The NatWest Tower brought a belated sense of coherence to the group of towers at the east of the City and gave it a distinctive feature. The architectural press was remarkably sympathetic to the building, which they recognized had already become a 'familiar landmark' long before its completion in

57 Pevsner 1973, 650–51; Harwood and Saint 1991, 216–17.

58 Cherry and Pevsner 1983, 592.

59 Cherry and Pevsner 1991, 250.

60 Cherry and Pevsner 1983, 324: '... the most obtrusive landmark in this part of outer London'.

61 Bradley and Pevsner 1997, 531 (Commercial Union Tower), 387 feet (118m); 588–89 (Britannic Tower), 395 feet (120m).

62 Bradley and Pevsner 1997, 606: 326 feet (99m) high.

63 Bradley and Pevsner 1997, 575; and below, no. 8.

February 1981. The final design was completed and first published in 1970, when the *Architects' Journal* remarked on the 'apparently entirely coincidental feature' that the floor plan closely mirrored the new logo of the recently-merged National Provincial and Westminster banks.[64] When, at an exhibition, the general public was asked to choose between 500 feet and 600 feet (152m and 183m) versions, they 'overwhelmingly' supported the taller tower.[65] When it was completed in 1981 *Building* considered it to be 'Britain's most exciting building for years'. A nostalgia for the era of tall buildings had begun, and the NatWest Tower remains among the most popular towers today, recognized by everyone because of its height and distinctive shape.[66]

Writing in 1972, David Rock considered office blocks among 'the most emotive urban design subjects', along with roads and residential tower blocks. 'The skyline too looks uncontrolled', he went on, 'and it is not always the popular villains of the day which make the biggest impact. In their time, Vickers, New Zealand House, the American Embassy, Centre Point were hounded but all of these are now accepted as contributing to the urban scene, especially in terms of long views'. Rather, he cites the slabs of New Scotland Yard, the DoE (Marsham Street) and Euston Centre as causing greater damage, while he feels that the sensitivity of Wool House (now demolished) and *The Economist* building is underappreciated. 'Where the infill is in a minority even large scale designs can be assimilated, especially if they are good, whereas the comprehensive schemes often burst open the street pattern without replacing it with anything better'.[67] In 1972, the opening of New York's World Trade Centre was threatening to bring down rents in all the surrounding properties, and Rock feared similar consequences should more tall buildings be erected in London, a pertinent thought in 2002.

64 *Architects' Journal*, **151**, no.4 (28 January 1970), 209.

65 *Architects' Journal*, **151**, no.9 (4 March 1970), 537.

66 *Building*, **223**, no.6756 (17 November 1972), 105; **240**, no.7174 (23 January 1981), 33–511; *RIBA Journal*, **88**, no.2 (February 1981), 10–11; no.3 (March 1981), 57 .

67 Rock 1972, 448–53, *passim*.

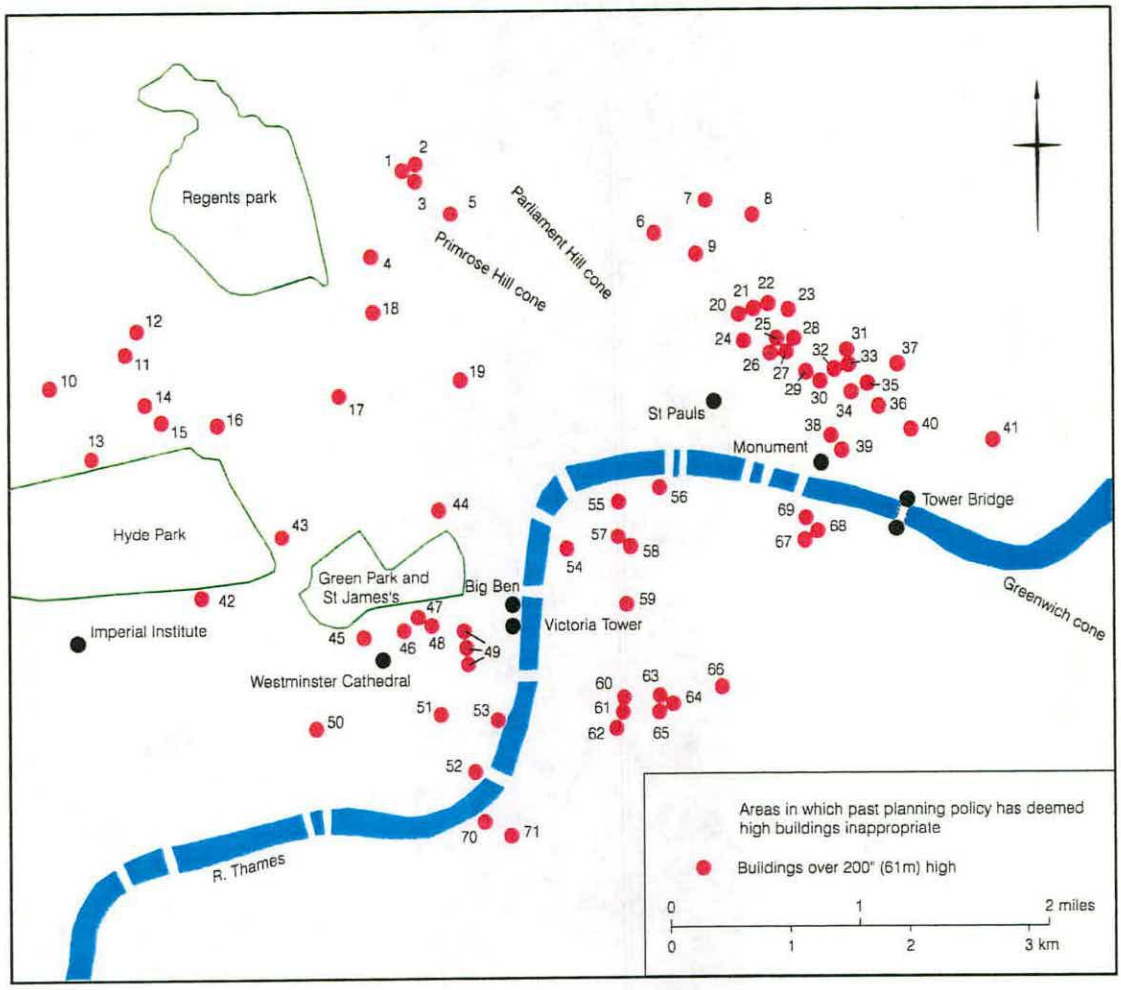

Fig. 1 Map of buildings over 200 feet (61m) in central London, based on Catchpole 1987 (Philip Sinton).

KEY TO MAP OF TALL BUILDINGS IN CENTRAL LONDON

1 Ampthill Square Estate, 1960
2 Ampthill Square Estate, 1960
3 Ampthill Square Estate, 1960
4 Euston Centre, 1962–72
5 Euston Station, 1974–78
6 Michael Cliffe House, 1959–63
7 Peregrine House, 1959–63
8 Rahere House, 1959–63
9 Turnpike House, King Square, 1965
10 Eastbourne Terrace, 1958–62
11 Marks and Spencer, Edgware Road
12 Burne House, 1972–77
13 Royal Lancaster Hotel, 1968
14 The Quadrangle
15 25 Porchester Place
16 Marble Arch Tower, 1973
17 London College of Fashion, 1962–63
18 Post Office Tower (BT Tower), 1961–65
19 Centre Point 1961–65
20 Lauderdale Tower, Barbican, 1963–72
21 Shakespeare Tower, Barbican, 1963–72
22 Defoe Tower, Barbican, 1963–72
23 Britannic House, 1964–67
24 Bastion House, 1968–76
25 Alban Gate, 1988–92
26 88 Wood Street, 1995–99
27 Royex House, 1961–63
28 City Tower, 1962–64
29 Drapers' Gardens, 1964–67
30 Angel Court, 1974–80
31 99 Bishopsgate, 1970–76
32 Stock Exchange, 1964–69
33 Tower 42 (NatWest Tower), 1970–81
34 8 Bishopsgate, 1974–81
35 Commercial Union Assurance, 1963–69
36 Lloyds Building, 1982–86
37 Petticoat Square, Middlesex Street, 1965–75
38 Barclays Bank, 54 Lombard Street, 1986–94
39 Dresder Kleinwort Wamershon, Fenchurch Street, 1963–68
40 Minster Court, Mincing Lane, 1987–91
41 Watney Market, 1968
42 Hyde Park Barracks, Knightsbridge, 1967–70
43 Hilton Hotel, 1961–63
44 New Zealand House, 1959–63
45 Portalnd House, Stag Place, 1959–63
46 Westminster City Hall, Victoria Street, 1960–66
47 Home Office, 1972–76
48 New Scotland Yard, 1962–66
49 Government Offices, Marsham Street, 1963–71
50 Glastonbury House, Abbots Manor Estate, 1964–69
51 Hide Tower, 1957–62
52 RHM Centre, Vauxhall Bridge, 1967–71
53 Millbank Tower (Vickers Tower), 1960–63
54 Shell Centre, 1957–63
55 Kent House, Upper Ground, 1970–72
56 King's Reach Tower, 1970–72
57 31s Tower, 1975–76
58 Union Jack Club, 1971–76
59 Lambeth Towers, 1965
60 Lambeth Walk, 1961–64
61 Lambeth Walk, 1961–64
62 Lambeth Walk, 1961–64
63 Cotton Gardens, 1966–70
64 Cotton Gardens, 1966–70
65 Cotton Gardens, 1966–70
66 Alexander Fleming House, 1959–66
67 Guy's Hospital Tower, 1963–75
68 London Bridge House, 1962
69 Southwark Towers, 1977–79
70 New Covent Garden Market, 1970–75
71 Keybridge House, 1975–76

DEVELOPMENT OUTSIDE LONDON

Britain's provincial cities were not developed with tall office buildings to the same degree as London; instead a greater proportion of new housing was in tall point blocks. The reasons for this are complex: land for building offices was more readily available and expected rents were relatively low, while land for housing was in short supply and building firms offered attractive deals for local authorities looking to build quickly and cheaply. Between 1952 and 1959 the London conurbation gained 45 per cent of the increase in employment, although it had only 27 per cent of the increase in population. That is a measure of the region's greater prosperity, and why from the late 1950s serious attempts were made to move offices out of London, and the first tall buildings in many provincial cities were constructed by or with the aid of the government.

The cities of the Midlands and North were substantially developed in the nineteenth century and comprised a largely distinct commercial centre surrounded by residential and industrial areas. As Ian Nairn wrote in 1960, 'each has a centre surrounded by a ring of blight, the exact pattern of Chicago and all other nineteenth-century American cities. Our first experiment in trying to equate material progress with true progress has blown up in our faces — a metaphorical explosion assisted in varying degrees by the real explosions of 1940–41'.[68] These cities do not have the extensive history of planning controls that determined the pattern of London building. What is significant is that at the end of the 1950s as many tall buildings were proposed for the provincial cities as for London. Many of the first tall buildings were in Manchester, such as Albert Bridge House for the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, begun in 1958, and that for the Co-operative Insurance Services.[69] These were prestigious schemes, the one the vanguard of the Government's policy on office dispersal out of London that prompted tall buildings elsewhere, the other a statement by a company of national importance with strong local roots amidst the populace of the north west. Nevertheless, the relative ease with which planning permission could be secured must also be considered a factor in the relative speed with which they were approved and constructed. Later in the 1960s economic uncertainties made it more difficult to build expensive, tall buildings, save in cities such as Bristol that were particularly favoured by the exodus of commerce from London.

Under the 1947 *Town and Country Planning Act* the provincial cities, and smaller boroughs too, produced an outline, largely aspirational plan. This had usually to be revised and refined in the 1960s, when more detailed plans were often published for a smaller area that was to be redeveloped comprehensively. The difficulties of traffic management by the early 1960s (a threefold increase in car ownership between 1947 and 1962) were often the motivation for these new plans. Birmingham had pioneered thinking about central area road planning in the 1940s and had consequently bought up many freeholds in the central area. While it never produced a comprehensive central area plan its redevelopment was an extreme model for those subsequently adopted elsewhere. Many cities produced plans for

68 Nairn 1960, 111.

69 I am grateful to Emily Cole for bringing this fact to my attention. For these two, see Hartwel 2001, 240–41, 247.

inner ring roads, some to motorway standards, within which area plans were produced showing land use, including new open spaces and suggested sites for tall buildings. Extensive local authority ownership in the central area, notably of large wholesale markets, meant that councils had a direct involvement in the redevelopment of their central areas, if usually in conjunction with specialist developers. Ravenseft Properties was set up in the 1940s by Louis Freedman and Fred Meynard to develop provincial high streets, beginning in the blitzed cities of Bristol, Exeter and Plymouth where licences were more readily available and with the backing of insurance companies.[70] In 1951 Arnold Hagenbach and Sam Chippindale formed the Arndale Property Trust, to develop parades of shops in northern towns. Their first large-scale enterprise was in Jarrow, in 1958, and by 1961 it owned 360 properties. The firm's first covered shopping centre was in Kilkenny, South Australia, but from the mid-1960s it began to attract local authorities and retailers to the idea here. The first opened at Cross Gates, Leeds, in September 1967 on a disused British Railways goods depot, with a department store, two supermarkets and sixty smaller shops. Fifteen more Arndale Centres followed in the 1970s, mainly to the designs of Percy Gray.[71]

All local authorities saw an increased demand for offices and especially for new shops, a reflection not only of the post-war increases in consumerism and bureaucracy, but also of a deliberate policy by local authorities looking to diversify the local manufacturing economy. The derating of industry by 75 per cent after the war, a Government imposition reduced in 1958 and abolished completely only in 1961, was a particular incentive.[72] In addition to provision for offices and shops, plans also included two other provisions that prompted high buildings. One was the expansion of higher education, in or just outside the central area on sites no longer large enough. Building high was a solution for nineteenth-century institutions unable otherwise to expand on their historic sites, and unable or unwilling to move out. The tallest building in Sheffield is the nineteen-storey Arts Tower at the university,[73] while the city centre itself remains relatively low. Local authorities also tried to encourage some central area population by the building of one or two high blocks of flats often at higher than average rents and aimed at professional people. Newcastle has a good example of central flats built for young professionals in Bewick Court, built in 1969–71 to the designs of T. K. Powell & Son on a deck right over the ring road, John Dobson Street.

The combination of local authority and/or speculative agent as developer, plus the lower land prices outside London, limited the numbers of truly tall buildings. In city centres with lower overall heights a tower of fifteen storeys will have the impact made by one of twenty-five in London.

Of the major provincial cities, Manchester most closely followed London's premise of concentrating new development, particularly high development, at certain points rather than adopting a plan of wholesale rebuilding, if largely because bombing left a swathe of open land for redevelopment around the cathedral while leaving the area around St Peter's Square intact. Manchester moreover exemplifies the problems

70 Marriott 1967, 60.

71 Adamson 1993.

72 Sutcliffe and Smith 1974, 64.

73 Pevsner 1967, 460.

faced by northern cities of struggling to modernize while losing their traditional economic base, with the rapid decline of the textile industry in the early 1950s followed by the loss of its docks in the 1960s. In Manchester the decline was never sufficient to prompt the special grants available to Development Areas, such as Merseyside and the North East, but it was nevertheless very real, especially in manufacturing. Ian Nairn complained that regional buildings were being designed by London firms with less care than if they were building in the capital, without explaining that higher rents in London allowed better materials and detailing to be used.[74] In London Alexander Fleming House was unusual in being built at only £5 per square foot; in Manchester this was normal. The seven-storey Elizabeth House, by the local firm of Cruickshank and Seward (1959–60), was intended to be a handsome stone-clad building appropriate to its prominent site opposite the Town Hall, but the developer ran out of money and cheaper spandrel panels of painted boarding were substituted. Such a story seems to be typical. Another attitude to the north is suggested by P. W. Macfarlane in *Town and Country Planning*, 'I sense that we southerners are living in a gigantic spiv's palace, scrambling over one another to make easy money out of the brawn and sweat of the industrial areas, such as the North-East, where so much of the real wealth of our country is created'.[75]

COVENTRY

In most provincial cities tall buildings were a small element within and subordinate to the overall Development Plan, introduced where a vertical emphasis was desired, but strictly limited because of their expense. In the original plan for the rebuilding of Coventry made in 1941, and submitted as a Development Plan in 1951 (it was approved by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government in 1957), building heights were deliberately constrained to the level of the three surviving medieval spires in the centre, important symbols of the pre-1940 city. After 1960 this outlook was modified to 'change a lingering image of small town character, to add interest to newly created spaces with vertical elements, to give the central area visual identity and variety of skyline, and to introduce residential accommodation'.[76] It was also a means of squeezing more accommodation into a small city centre constrained by a tight ring road aligned as early as 1945. In housing it meant a series of seventeen-storey towers at strategic points just outside the centre in Hillfields and Spon End, and in the city centre terminal flats were additions to the shopping centre, closing the axes of Smithford Way and Lower Precinct, while office towers were proposed for Market Way in 1971. Towers were also sited as focal elements for the railway station in 1965, the Polytechnic (now Coventry University) in 1966 and the civic offices in 1973. These buildings are all no more than seventeen storeys high, but they are notable for the way in which plant rooms and lift houses were treated aerodynamically to make interesting shapes across the skyline.

BIRMINGHAM

Coventry is unusual in that most of the city centre was acquired and developed by

74 Nairn 1960, 112. See, also, Parkinson-Bailey 2000, 177.

75 P. W. Macfarlane, 'Capital of the North East', *Town and Country Planning*, 30, no. 8–9 (August–September 1962), 336–39.

76 Terence Gregory, 'Coventry', in Holliday 1973, 116

the council and the City Architect's Department, whose detailed post-war Development Plan was followed fairly consistently. The Birmingham Corporation also owned large areas of its city centre, but its councillors did not want to discourage developers by laying down a rigid planning scheme. They preferred to offer developers a complete freedom to design what they liked, and then to persuade them to introduce modifications as a late condition in the planning permission. Once a developer's interest was aroused in a site, he would often then agree to extend the area of corporation freehold land by acquiring adjacent privately owned sites and passing them over. When work began on the inner ring road in 1957, and building sites were cleared along its flanks, the city became even more concerned to attract new development. However, the first three sites to be marketed prompted only three offers. It was thus fortunate that one of these came from the builders John Laing and Son, working with the local developer Jo Godfrey, who offered to take over all three sites and to prepare a single coherent scheme. The result was the long, ribbon-like six-storey development of Smallbrook Ringway, designed by the local architect James A. Roberts, one of the first of a new kind of speculative modernism that was busy, curvaceous and altogether 'pop architecture' in its styling and easy admittance of signage, shop window displays and ready alteration.

Godfrey, as JLG Investments Ltd, went on to be the developer of the Bull Ring Centre, persuading the Corporation to demolish its nineteenth-century Market Hall and to offer the huge site thus created at a relatively low row ground rent. The final scheme developed by Sydney Greenwood and T. J. Hirst in 1961–64 was rather different from that by Roberts originally devised in 1958, but it was when it opened in 1964 it was called 'one of the most advanced and successful shopping centres in Britain'.[77] One element that survived from the original scheme was a condition of the council that there should be a circular tower of at least twelve storeys at its junction with New Street. The result, heightened by Roberts to twenty-four storeys in his revised design after work had begun on the foundations in 1960, was the Rotunda, the most distinctive landmark of the new Birmingham.[78] The result of this very flexible attitude was that far more of the city was rebuilt than in other big provincial cities like Manchester, Liverpool and Leeds, though all faced a similarly constrained city centre and shortage of shops. In this development the City Architect's Department, under A. G. Sheppard Fidler, was not consulted about the development; instead the Public Works Department under Herbert Manzoni helped the developer to obtain a maximum of rentable floor space.[79]

A rather more planned development is that of the eastern part of the Calthorpe Estate, the privately-owned enclave west of the city in Edgbaston, where a group of medium-rise office buildings were developed under the aegis of the estate's architect, John D. Madin. Madin was also responsible for Birmingham's most impressive tall building, a printing works and offices for the *Birmingham Post and Mail* on the ring road at Colmore Circus, that included a seventeen-storey curtain-walled tower that could be partially sub-let.[80] At Five Ways, the wavy-roofed Auchinleck House of thirteen storeys by the J. Seymour Harris Partnership occupies a nodal road and rail intersection on the ring road. 'Birmingham claims, perhaps

77 Sutcliffe and Smith 1974, 443–44.

78 *Architects' Journal*, 131, no.3381 (4 February 1960), 188; and see below, no. 14.

79 Sutcliffe and Smith 1974, 448.

80 See below, no. 15.

with good reason, that it has become a city of this century, and that it now contains more buildings of our own time than any other city in Britain, or perhaps Europe'.[81] So wrote a historian as late as 1971, as the last developments — notably Seifert's Alpha Tower begun that year — belatedly joined the skyline, but the ebullient optimism and international comparison are characteristic of the whole Sixties.

LIVERPOOL

The smaller scale of redevelopment can be seen in central Liverpool and Manchester reflects their relative lack of post-war prosperity compared with Coventry and Birmingham. In Liverpool the main central development was again on land owned by the Corporation, again the central wholesale and retail markets. This time the property company involved was Ravenseft Properties Ltd. A deal was agreed with the city council in 1960, with James A. Roberts as architect. The scheme was designed in 1962 and begun in 1966. St John's Precinct, with its 400 feet (122m) high Beacon bar and restaurant wrapped round the development's boiler flue,[82] was intended to 'place Liverpool ... in the forefront of "modern" cities'. In 1962 Alderman H. Macdonald, chairman of the city's Development and Planning Committee, commented of the pedestrianised shopping that 'these plans are unique. There is nothing like this anywhere in this country, nothing even in Europe, outside Venice'.[83] The design of the Beacon is based on Rotterdam's Euromast, built in 1960 for an international horticultural show. Graeme Shankland, the city's Planning Consultant, sent a postcard of it to his planning team in late 1961. But Liverpool's version is taller. St John's occupies a pivotal place in Shankland's master plan for the city centre, conceived in 1962, and featuring pedestrian walkways and vehicular underpasses. The vertical separation of pedestrians and vehicles is a crucial part of any city centre planning from this time, but because it was conceived so late the Liverpool plan is a curious mixture of public proposals with speculative projects approved before the plan was finalized, centred on the creation of an underground rail loop for trains, an inner-city motorway, pedestrian schemes, with more shopping, hotels and housing in the inner area.

MANCHESTER

Formal planning in Manchester concentrated on the creation of a new civic area with a new public square to redeem the city's shortage of open space. This idea had its origins in 1934, with a processional route from the Town Hall to new law courts, but was partially relaxed in favour of a more picturesque disposition in 1962. A new office precinct centred on the cathedral was then proposed for the western edge of the city bordering Salford, but was realised only haphazardly, from the building of Albert Bridge House (Manchester's first tall, modern building, of 1958–62 by the Ministry of Works),[84] to the formation of Shambles Square in the 1970s. Other office blocks were concentrated around Portland Street, which it was proposed to convert into an underpass; the new buildings each included a podium incorporating

81 Little 1971, 42.

82 Pevsner 1969, 176–77.

83 *Liverpool Echo* (20 September 1962).

84 Hartwell 2001, 247.

a first-floor walkway above the traffic. Telephone House (1959), a fourteen-storey tower and podium building, was followed by the twenty-one-storey St Andrew's House, built by the local firm of Leach, Rhodes & Walker as a speculation, and with its service core continually cast with a climbing shuttering and tower cranes — a very early adoption of a continuous pour technique.[85]

Leach, Rhodes & Walker were to repeat the process at twenty-three-storey Highland House, next to Victoria Station, in 1966, the same year that Fitzroy Robinson began work on a new Bank of England office, which included a thirteen-storey speculative office tower, completed in 1971. From here the high-level walkway was to lead into the first-floor shopping mall incorporated in Piccadilly Plaza, built in 1961–65 on the one extensive bomb site adjoining Piccadilly by Covell & Matthews for the developer E. Alex Colman.[86] A crazy envelope of rough textured concrete across three blocks, this constructivist Odyssey of projecting shapes, including a folded 'butterfly' roof on the smallest office tower, Bernard House (demolished in 2000), created an extraordinary broken skyline, while the pedestrian levels were decorated with mosaics and tile patterning. Not only is this a quintessential Sixties' megastructure for its complex of hotel, seven-sorey and twenty-four-storey office towers, shops and car parking within its single compass, its style personifies the swinging 'pop' idiom beloved of developers seeking to maximize their plot ratios by means of another cantilever. Nairn described it as both 'fuzzily humanistic' and 'a good joke ... the way in which all of the parts of the Piccadilly Hotel have grown knobs since the original model appeared is a potted history of recent architectural fashion'.[87] Yet the joyousness of this kind of architecture of the Sixties, beginning to be appreciated in London, is lost here under a sanitising recladding.

Manchester was saved architecturally by its status as a regional capital and therefore home to a number of headquarters offices, for which a prestigious image was required. Albert Bridge House, was built by the MHLG as its regional office. The largest of the Leach, Rhodes and Walker buildings were dedicated offices for a local engineering firm, while the presence of the Co-operative Insurance Society and Co-operative Wholesale Society ensured that Manchester got two of England's best modern offices, built by G. S. Hay and Gordon Tait, the latter of John Burnet, Tait & Partners. The CIS Tower is twenty-five storeys, and both the entrance hall, with its relief by William Mitchell, and the top-floor executive suite, by Misha Black and the Design Research Unit, survive — making this also one of the best-preserved examples of a Sixties' office tower.[88]

NOTTINGHAM

Unlike the cities previously discussed, Nottingham was little scathed by bombing. On the one city centre bomb site, Pearl Assurance erected a heavily moulded slab of some twelve storeys in around 1960, described as a 'glass palace' in 1966. Although the city had produced a Development Plan in 1947, which had included a ring road drawn tightly round the commercial centre, until the mid-1960s little had been done,

85 Ibid., 192.

86 Ibid., 189–90; and see below, no. 11.

87 Nairn 1960, 115; Nairn 1967, 45.

88 Hartwell 2001, 240–41; and see below, no. 10.

when it was written that 'Nottingham has — not before its time, joined the Brave New World Brigade'.[89] The first phase of the ring road, Maid Marian Way, was then constructed, and flanked by blocks of ten- to fourteen-storey offices, hotels and car parks to either side. On the edge of the city, a seventeen-storey tower was added to the university in 1962–65 (designed by Andrew Renton in a scheme passed on by Sir Basil Spence and Partners), to preserve the parkland setting of the rest of the campus.[90] The appointment of the first City Architect and Chief Planner in 1964 and 1966 respectively, and the arrival of Arthur Ling from Coventry as head of the Architecture and Civic Planning Department at the university, brought a belated professionalism to the city's redevelopment but little impact on the quality of design — save to the City Architect's art school for the new Trent Polytechnic — but drew Nottingham belatedly and disastrously into system building for its public housing. The City Architect, David Jenkin, had previously been at Hull and brought Nottingham into the Yorkshire Development Group for the building of seven-storey slabs at Balloon Wood in 1967–72. As Ling wrote, 'we have almost lost the chance to make a proper all embracing plan for the city's future skyline'.[91] The two major city centre redevelopments both date from the mid-1960s. Victoria Station, the most lavish station on the Great Central Railway, was closed under Dr Beeching's rationalisation of the railways, and in July 1964 redevelopment proposals were made by the Capital and Cities Property Company with British Railways for a mixed scheme that was originally designed to include sports facilities, cinemas and a concert hall. As finally designed in 1967 by the local firm of Arthur Swift & Partners, however, the Victoria Centre was a vast shopping centre five times the size of Birmingham's Bull Ring, with car parking in the railway cutting below and twenty storeys of corporation flats above.[92] The *Architects' Journal* described the scheme as the 'A-bomb among the block busters, so to speak, and one feels that it is way off target'.[93] The building of Victoria Centre prompted the building of a second shopping complex by the City Corporation itself, and in 1965, in a deal with Town and City Properties, it announced the redevelopment of the Broadmarsh area with an indoor shopping centre and bus station, which included the demolition of Drury Hill, the best surviving medieval street in the city.

NEWCASTLE

Newcastle came even later to redevelopment. There redevelopment policies were strongly marked by changes in political power, as each of the main parties succeeded each other in turn. When they succeeded a Progressive (Liberal) council in June 1958 the new Labour leaders found there was no control of city centre planning, but a free for all. Scotswood Road was being cleared for rebuilding but there was a shortage of other sites and the city had lost a bid to expand its boundaries. A key speech set the scene, delivered in December 1959 by the Chairman of the Housing and Town Planning Committees, one Councillor Smith.

> 'We live in a city which is a potential goldmine, and it astonishes those of us who

89 John Barsby and David O'Brien, 'The Changing Face of Nottingham', *Nottingham Topic*, 3, no.27, (August 1966), 41.

90 Pevsner 1979b, 260.

91 Noted in Barsby and O'Brien, 'The Changing Face of Nottingham', op. cit., 58.

92 Pevsner 1979b, 241.

93 *Architects' Journal*, 142, no.11 (15 September 1965), 597–98.

> are Socialists that you who talk about vested interests and private enterprise have been living on top of a goldmine for ten years and have failed to exploit it. You talk about the cost to the ratepayer. The cost of not developing Percy Street and Northumberland Street is measured in millions of pounds. There is no city of comparable population that has the turnover of Newcastle'.[94]

Smith was accused of 'thinking pink and talking blue' and responded, 'I would rather believe in Clause Four than Charles Clore'.[95] Instead he wanted Newcastle to become what Cliff Michelmore on the BBC's *Tonight* programme, in November 1962, was to call 'the new Brasilia', with new shops, offices and housing.

Parts of central Newcastle are remarkable survivals, with seventeenth-century buildings down by the waterfront and a substantially intact early nineteenth-century retail area (Grainger Town) on the hill above. At the end of 1960 Wilfred Burns, who had been chief planner at Coventry, went to Newcastle to set up a City Planning Department. In early 1961 the first report of the big changes envisaged for the central area appeared.[96] The aim was to 'deal boldly with the City's difficult traffic situation by providing a complete system of urban motorways'.[97] In April 1961 the Newcastle *Civic News* both explained the problem and set it in the context of the times. 'Yuri Gugarin thrilled the world by becoming the first man to go into space and return. He had in fact been round the world in 108 minutes. By contrast the people of Newcastle were *inching* slowly towards factory and office'. However, on that day there was published what the *Evening Chronicle* described as 'news of a space age Newcastle — the plan for the redevelopment of the city centre'.[98] If men could reach the moon in the Sixties, then what chance had Newcastle of remaining undisturbed? Like Nottingham, Newcastle had been almost untouched by wartime bombing, but in 1925–29 the Tyne Bridge had been built,[99] which brought traffic from the south directly into the most modern shopping streets. Burns was thus responding to an existing situation when he proposed a circuit or 'box' of motorways right through the heart of the city. The area to the east and north of the main twentieth-century shopping street, Northumbria Street, was to be transformed with new shops, offices, a central library and urban motorway, together with extensions to the university and college of technology (now the University of Northumbria). This scheme also created unprecedented opportunities for the wholesale rebuilding of the city. 'Its structure is largely worn out *as a whole*, and the huge scale of redevelopment needed involves a process of central area revolution rather than evolution, in order to create within relatively few years a fine city centre that will function efficiently for succeeding generations'.[100]

With the roads would come a series of prestige developments by imported architects of international significance at nodal points. Is it this rejection of local individualism a factor in the deadening of regional cities? The change began at King's College,

94 Newcastle City Council Minutes, held at Central Library Newcastle, T370, Acc.589, 16 December 1959.

95 Ibid. The criticism was lead by the Liberal member, Alderman McKeag.

96 *The Builder*, 200, no.6153 (21 April 1961), 754–55.

97 *Industrial Architecture*, 6, no.5 (May 1963), 310–11.

98 Cuttings held at Tyne and Wear Record Office, Newcastle.

99 Pevsner and Richmond 1992, 459–60.

100 Macfarlane, 'Capital of the North East', op.cit., 337.

which in 1964 became Newcastle University, and where in 1956 Basil Spence was commissioned to design the Physics or Herschel Building on the site of the corporation tram depot. Between 1957 and 1962 an eight-storey tower and podium, clad in slate, was built on this prominent site.[101] Further schemes followed for Spence's London and Edinburgh practices. One particularly important scheme given prominence was the All Saints Office Precinct, devised in 1969 by Spence and Philip Bennett for Ravenseft, a cluster of indifferent offices (with T. P. Bennett & Partners as executant architects) set round the handsome eighteenth-century church of All Saints.[102] Again prominent because of its rising site rather than particularly tall at ten storeys, only two blocks of the intended redevelopment were completed. Spence was also responsible for the new central library (1968), which replaced that of 1884 demolished for the creation of the urban expressway John Dobson Street.[103] Above the new road the twenty-storey Bewick Court was designed to bring a residential population back to the city centre.[104] But most controversial of all was Robert Matthew, Johnson-Marshall & Partners' Swan House, a seven-storey block built in 1968–70 over a two- and three-storey podium that sits right across the motorway on 84 feet (26m) steel trusses and conceals a subterranean shopping arcade — Dobson's Royal Arcade of 1831–33 crudely replicated in concrete.[105] The council's coup would have been to have a hotel of twenty-eight storeys in Eldon Square, designed by Arne Jacobsen in 1967 when he briefly opened a Newcastle office.[106] Fortes were brought in to finance the project, but the firm's merger with Trust Houses brought delays, and rising inflation brought the scheme to an end.[107]

BRISTOL

The experience of some southern towns and cities was rather different. Bristol was extremely early in both producing a salvage list of historic buildings (the first, in 1941), and in submitting a Development Plan to Government (the second, after Plymouth, in 1946). It proposed the comprehensive redevelopment of both its retail and commercial centre, although only the former was destroyed in 1940, and was rejected as over-ambitious. Broadmead, the rebuilt shopping centre, is disappointingly bland, both in its axial, three-storey plan by the City Architect's Department, and in its elevations by a variety of commercial firms. The first commercial redevelopment after the abolition of licences adopted a neo-Georgian style, a conservatism appropriate to the formal lines of Park Street where some late eighteenth-century façades survived. Only in the areas of wholesale commercial rebuilding on the fringes of Broadmead and Horsefair was curtain walling adopted, and even there the nine-storey slab of Pithay House and adjoining fifteen-storey Tower House were old-fashioned in their detailing by the time of their construction as government offices in 1964. Bristol had a shortage of offices, for which little

101 Pevsner and Richmond 1992, 449.

102 Ibid., 472.

103 The Central Library was designed by the Edinburgh-based practice Spence, Glover and Ferguson; the Herschel (Physics) Building at the University by the London practice (later Sir) Basil Spence and Partners.

104 Pevsner and Richmond 1992, 493–94.

105 *Architect and Building News*, 7, no.1 (3 September 1970), 41. Also, Pevsner and Richmond 1992, 485.

106 Correspondence in St Catherine's College archive; *City News* (September 1969), 3. I am grateful to Grace McCombie for this reference.

107 Kenneth A. Galley, 'Newcastle upon Tyne', in Holliday 1973, 227.

provision was made in the Development Plans of 1946 and 1952, a shortage exacerbated when in 1958 the Government announced its policies for the decentralisation of London's offices with its publication, *Offices on the Move*. In the early 1960s the historic skyline of the city's spires began quickly to be interrupted by new commercial development.

The first and most important intrusion was a prestigious office building for the packaging company of E. S. A. Robinson, built to the designs of its in-house architect John Collins in 1961–64.[108] The Robinson Building in Victoria Street was over twice as big as any previous scheme, and its fifteen-storey square tower marked a maximization of the plot ratio on a peninsular corner site, with the remainder of the plot being occupied by a conference centre partly built over a small plaza. It has an architectural quality associated with the best custom-built offices but rarely seen in provincial cities. Its particular success was the simple but elegant façade of the tower with the glazing recessed behind the precast panels. Structural mullions supported the panels shaped to give a gentle arch to each window in a style that echoed that of the nearby Victorian warehouses, while their stark white Carrara marble aggregate gives it the sharpness of a de Chirico representation or of the Palazzo della Civiltà del Lavoro at EUR outside Rome.[109] This harsh whiteness and sharp moulding makes it still stand out in the townscape ain warehouse development. It was controversial not only because it punctuated the skyline, but because it forced attention on the flat area of largely derelict warehousing south of the waterfront and away from the centre. Still more controversial was Clifton Heights, completed a year later to the designs of Raymond Moxley. This is also a prestigious building, and unusual in being a mixed development of offices, luxury flats, shopping promenade and penthouse restaurant, contained in an eleven-storey tower and three-storey podium set into the side of the hill on a site in the heart of early nineteenth-century Clifton made prominent by the ring road imposed alongside.

The 'Brown Ban' of 1964 on office-building in and around London, together with the introduction of minimum standards in the *Offices, Shops and Railway Premises Act* of that year encouraged the building of many new offices in Bristol in the mid- and late 1960s. The decade saw an increase in office employment by 22 per cent there. In 1966 a City Centre Policy Report was published, which sought to address the need for new office locations, roads and car parking; it included conservation and pedestrian policies but deliberately refused to pronounce on building heights. Nevertheless, a limit of 120 feet (37m) was set informally, though this had already been broken by the Robinson Building and the Bristol and West Building, the latter completed in 1967 to the designs of Alec French and Partners and 182 feet (55m) high. Yet it was argued that Clifton Heights and the council slabs built at St Lawrence were in many ways more intrusive on the skyline because of their location, and in 1968 the Bristol Civic Society produced its own report, which did not impose a height limit but identified areas and views where tall building should be restricted. It recommended that tall buildings should be concentrated to the east and south-east of the city centre, towards Temple Meads. This policy was eventually published in 1972, and while it was never officially adopted by the council it carried considerable influence. Instead, the area immediately north of the centre, Stokes

108 Below, no. 12.

109 Formerly the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana, the main World Fair E'42 exhibition building, designed following a competition by Giovanni Guerrini, Ernesto La Padula and Mario Romano in 1937–40.

Croft and Lewins Mead, began to be redeveloped not with towers but with deep slab blocks that maximized the plot ratios by means of jumbled massing and deep plans that coupled with walkways and heavy concrete elevations made for a far less pleasant environment than had the earlier point blocks.[110] In the Bristol office boom that followed in 1968–73 it was bulk rather than height that damaged the skyline. Three buildings epitomise this problem, Avon House, the office slab occupied by the new county council (1972); Colston Centre, designed in 1961 but not completed until 1973, and fifteen-storeys high on a prominent site overlooking the Tramways Centre; and Tollgate House of sixteen storeys on the east side of the city, completed in 1975. Plans for a 305 feet (93m) office tower on the site of the Central Telephone Exchange was rejected after a local campaign in 1972, and this triggered an overall change in policy. The shift away from new building in the years 1973–75 had three causes: the maturation of a powerful conservation lobby, a collapse in the property boom, and political changes in a city council that was subsequently weakened by the 1974 local government reorganization.

New Towns

Tall buildings played little part in the building of the New Towns created from 1946 onwards. In part this was due to their relatively modest scale as first conceived, with 60,000 inhabitants in the manner of Letchworth or Welwyn Garden City rather than the scale of a small city, and in part due to the cost of building high. Where taller buildings of ten or more storeys were incorporated it was to give a focus to a neighbourhood as at Harlow, where each residential area has a focal block of flats.[111] The Lawn, built in 1950–51 at Mark Hall North, was the first point block in England, at ten storeys. Harlow has seven such towers in its neighbourhoods. The central area, on the crest of a low hill and also known as The High, is crowned by the nine-storey town hall, now proposed for demolition, and flanked by Hughs and Edmunds Towers each of thirteen storeys and built in 1955–57 to bring a residential population without children to the town centre.[112] Other New Towns similarly built flats in or close to their town centres; designed to attract professional single people to the area they were built to higher standards than most council housing. The best example is Brooke House, Basildon, built in 1960–62 by Anthony B. Davies of the Basildon Development Corporation, with Basil Spence as consultant.[113] Fourteen storeys high, it sits at junction of the two main shopping squares, with sculpture by F. E. McWilliam, a fountain and a smart entrance hall designed to provide an executive chic for young professionals. At Bracknell, Arup Associates were responsible for the eighteen-storey Point Royal, conceived as a means of increasing the town's density as the designated development area was smaller here than at the other New Towns. We have seen instances of similar high-rise developments in Coventry and Newcastle, but Point Royal is unusual in being located in one of the neighbourhoods — and this rather upsets the balance of the town, rather as the Robinson Building used to disturb that of central Bristol.

110 Punter 1990, especially 50–83.

111 Pevsner 1965, 223–31, *passim*.

112 Frederick Gibberd, Ben Hyde Harvey, Len White et al., *Harlow: The Story of a New Town*, (Stevenage 1980), 106–07.

113 Pevsner 1965, 76–77: '... an exceptionally large-scale feature, such as is much needed in the New Towns'.

BASINGSTOKE

Other southern towns benefitted, like Bristol, from the dispersal of Government offices and the 'Brown Ban' on London development. One particular beneficiary was Basingstoke. Basingstoke was a market town that expanded relatively little until the late 1930s when vehicle manufacture was established at Houndmills, north of the town. Following the recommendations of the Royal Commission on the Distribution of the Industrial Population set up in 1937, and which reported in 1940 (the Barlow Report), Patrick Abercrombie recommended a number of towns or sites for expansion outside the immediate London region, and Basingstoke was his preference for Hampshire.[114] In May 1947 the Borough Council received a report on the proposal and in November the matter was considered by Hampshire County Council. By January 1950 the Borough Council had acquired 90 acres (36ha) of land, and a limited expansion was welcomed by the county. The *Town Development Act* of 1952 formalized the concept of 'expanded towns' that could be developed by local authorities, and was preferred by the Conservative Governments of the 1950s to the idea of New Towns developed by Government agencies. Negotiations between the LCC, Hampshire and Basingstoke councils were underway by October 1955, and were completed in October 1961 when it was agreed to build 11,500 new dwellings in the town, with a consequent projected population increase from 25,000 to 86,000 over twenty years. The proposals for Basingstoke were a factor in the scheme for a new town at the nearby village of Hook being rejected the same year.[115] The Town Map and Comprehensive Development Area Map were approved by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government in 1963.

Basingstoke was originally to have been developed with light industry zoned north and east of the railway station and with compact, low-rise high-density council housing. A new town centre was built into the Loddon valley, the fall of the land used to conceal car parking and service access under a podium with shops on top, as had been a feature of the LCC's radical design for Hook. But by 1967, when more detailed plans were prepared by Leonard Vincent, Raymond Gorbing and Partners, formerly of the Stevenage Development Corporation, it was recognized that the area was particularly attractive to offices, and the Eastrop area was redesignated as an office park. By 1970 the County Council realised that the population target of 86,000 would be reached well before 1981, so attractive was Basingstoke for its accessibility to London and the Thames Valley, and to pleasant countryside. The housing became larger and less compactly planned, and from the 1970s was developed privately rather than by the consortium of councils.[116] The idea of defining neighbourhoods by traffic planning based on Radburn layouts, and of using the contours of the site to separate cars from people, were developed from the plans for Cumbernauld and, more completely, for Hook, which because it was never built assumed something of an ideal.[117] The Civil Service Commission moved to a seventeen-storey block on Alençon Link by the station in 1971, where a similar-

114 Abercrombie 1945, 167.

115 John H. Dunning, *Economic Planning and Town Expansion* (Southampton WEA, Southern District 1963), 11–31.

116 Leonard Vincent, Raymond Gorbing and Partners, *Basingstoke Central Area* (Hampshire County Council 1967); Hampshire County Council, *Basingstoke Review: Summary of Draft Proposals for Second Review of the Town Map* (Hants CC, May 1972). Brendan Butler, *The Dream Fulfilled: Basingstoke Town Development, 1961–1978* (Basingstoke Borough Council 1980).

117 Buchanan 1963, 168–69.

sized block was also built for IBM. To the east, Basing View in Eastrop was developed with offices, including Fenum House, opened for the Automobile Association in 1972. The intervening land was developed with ten- to twelve-storey offices in the succeeding years. The best of the office developments is Gateway House, the prototype by Arup Associates for its Finsbury Avenue development, described as 'a mechanical hill embodying a dialogue between technology and nature' for its attention to environment and planting within a refined steel shell.[118]

118 Murray and Trombley 1990, 96.

CONCLUSION

By the 1980s very different patterns of development were emerging for the north and south. The north was stagnant, while the demand for office buildings continued in the south, especially along the corridor of the M4 and in surrounding areas such as Basingstoke. Zoning gave these towns their office parks based on the motor car, with medium height office buildings and few supporting services, and only Canary Wharf in London and perhaps Brindley Place in Birmingham looked to create an urban infrastructure of transport links, restaurants, pubs and related entertainment and sporting facilities. The bringing of the Docklands Light Railway and subsequently the underground to Canary Wharf in 1999 is a rare attempt to lock a business park into the infrastructure of a city. The imposition of three overweening towers upon Canary Wharf, in the neck of land between the old West India Import and Export Docks, caused an outcry when announced in 1985. It could not have happened had not the creation four years before of the London Dockland Development Corporation reduced planning controls in the Isle of Dogs and surrounding riverside areas. The tallest tower, designed by Cesar Pelli who had been the architect of the World Financial Center in New York by the same developers, Olympia and York, brought a new landmark to London in No.1 Canada Square, at 800 feet (244m) outbid only by Helmut Jahn's Messerturm in Frankfurt as the highest tower in Europe. The building of subsequent phases is the first indication that the age of the tall, speculative office tower is not yet over, at least in London.

No.1 Canada Square is typical, however, of the new breed of tall office towers from the 1980s, with its great scale and with emphasis given to a distinctively geometric shape. New York has many of these, each tower competing for prominence by means of a novel profile and/or use of materials, the witty lines of John Burgee and Philip Johnson's 'Lipstick Building' (1983–86) competing with their 'Chippendale skyscraper' of 1984 and Der Scutt's glassy Trump Tower of 1983. Many office towers, especially in small cities such as Philadelphia, went on to consciously and crudely imitated their predecessors of the 1930s. The 1990s saw a change in styles as green issues began to be addressed, and buildings symbolically assumed a more organic form; Norman Foster & Partners' scheme for the new headquarters of Swiss Re (the epitet 'Gherkin' is strangely apposite) is the first large-scale, energy conscious example in Britain of this greater humanism, although an early precursor of the humanistic office building is Ralph Erskine's Ark in Hammersmith of 1988–92.

Yet the tall building at its most simple remains an important symbol of the Modern Movement, and of the movement at its most functional heyday, entirely unencumbered by historical reference or ornament. In the hands of Mies or Jacobsen the Modern Movement was an expression of space, not the construction of façades but the enclosure of a volume by a simple sheath that was to be as light and clear as possible. The tall office building, not the residential tower with its necessary subdivisions, smaller windows and encumbered by balconies and net curtains, is a most articulate expression of this ideal. The light towers of the 1960s, designed to reflect light and the passing clouds or expressing a sense of rhythm and movement in their concrete castings, thus have a special place in architectural minimalism that cannot be repeated.

PART TWO
TALL BUILDINGS IN LONDON

1
CASTROL HOUSE

COORDINATES

Address:	*174 Marylebone Road, NW1*
Date:	*1957–59*
Architects:	*Gollins, Melvin, and Ward, with Casson and Conder*
Engineer:	*W.V. Zinn*
Height:	*168 feet (51m)*

ACCOUNT

Castrol House (now Marathon House) was built for the Wakefield Castrol Group and completed in 1959.[1] Casson and Conder were the original architects of the preliminary design, who then handed over the supervision of the project to Gollins, Melvin, Ward and Partners, but were retained to design the ground-floor bank. The developers were the Hammerson Group.

The building occupies a one-acre (0.4ha) site, and consists of a three-storey podium and a tower of twelve storeys, fifteen in total. The tower is constructed of a reinforced concrete frame, with a flat slab system for floors, and with the structural columns placed within the aluminium curtain walling. It was the first exemplar of the curtain-wall, slab-and podium office in London. Tower and podium have separate foundations to counteract the differential loadings. The original curtain walling was based on a 4 feet (1.2m) module for the tower, with a 7 feet 9 inch (2.4m) grid for the podium. The aluminium cladding system was developed with the Aluminium Research Development Association, and was an early exponent of a unit system on a large scale in Britain.

The height of the building was restricted by Westminster City Council Planning Department, because of the proximity of the site to Sir Edwin Cooper's Marylebone Town Hall of 1920. Twelve schemes had to be submitted before one was accepted; the proposed height of the tower was eventuallu lowered by four storeys, and the podium by one storey. The architects complained that the restrictions imposed by Westminster, and the ground landlord, hampered the scheme. They had been unable to provide a public or private courtyard at ground level because the whole site was to be built on; the frontage to Marylebone Road had to be continuous, and not less than two storeys high. The plot ratio was not to exceed 3.5: 1; no part of the building was to be higher than the Town Hall, and the offices had to be planned as economically as possible. Hugh Casson drily remarked that 'It is a miracle that any building gets put up in London at all these days'.[2]

The accommodation was originally arranged with a garage in the basement, and the rest of the building providing offices, a restaurant, a showroom, conference rooms,

1 Cherry and Pevsner 1991, 658–59.

2 *Illustrated Builder and Carpenter* (21 August 1959), 266.

and a cinema, with a residential suite and observation dome on the top floor. The entrance foyer was designed with particular care, especially in its staircase detailing; this cut through an aluminium mural in raised relief which depicted, through two storeys, the processing of oil in all its various stages from the first experiments to the final end product, speed. This sculptural mural entitled 'The Story of Lubricating Oil' was designed by Geoffrey Clark. Fitted throughout the office space was a 'new form of suspended ceiling from Denmark',[3] which may have been an early example of the suspended ceiling in this country.

Castrol moved out to Swindon in 1973, and the British Leyland Motor Corporation moved in. The building was recommended for listing but turned down by the Department of Cultre Media and Sport in November 1995. Since then it has been converted into flats, renamed, and the exterior reclad.

Contemporary and Recent Comment

In the years around and since its construction, press comment on Castrol House has been almost entirely positive. In 1960, the *Architectural Review* wrote:

> 'It is a striking landmark on London's skyline. Castrol House has earned a place in England's architectural history as the first example this side of the Atlantic of a curtain walled office tower perched on a two-storey podium'.[4]

Nikolaus Pevsner was a champion of the work produced by architects Gollins, Ward and Merrill. He traced their liking for the international Modern style back to Gropius's factory at Alfeld in 1910, via Mies van der Rohe (Lake Shore Drive Apartments in Chicago, 1948–51) and Skidmore Owings and Merrill (Lever House on Park Avenue, Manhattan, New York, 1950–51), a rectangular block of glass and concrete with opaque bands, and no ornament.[5] But it was possibly the Seagram building in New York (1954–58) that gave the style and image of power and prestige to corporate structures that Castrol clearly wished to emulate.

Nicholas Heman commented in *The Guardian* in 1973:

> 'In the circumstances Castrol House was an elegant solution to a stringent brief, though it was soon shown to be relatively unsophisticated in its provision of mechanical services'.[6]

Again, in 1960 *Concrete Quarterly* thought:

> 'Castrol House ... is surely one of the most spectacular office blocks to be built in London since the war. The high standard of finishes and detailing would be in any case enough to command attention: with its clear colour, clean lines and shining surfaces it is as welcome, amidst their gloomy architecture of the street, as a bright shop window on a dark Sunday'.[7]

3 Ibid., 267.

4 *Architectural Review* (March 1960), 167.

5 Pevsner 1979, 157

6 *The Guardian* (23 July 1973).

7 *Concrete Quarterly* 1960, 7

Ian Nairn considered it 'the first tall block in London to show some elegance and care for details ... the best thing of its kind in London, with the gaucheries hidden, it looks magnificent'.[8] The gaucheries referred to the added storey on the podium which compensated for the loss of height of the tower.

In an early comment in 1959, the *Architects' Journal* wrote:

> 'The result is some badly needed variety to the London skyline and a further development of the simple, neutral, curtain wall by the firm which was among the first in the country to master it. How frustrating that there should be such a disaster and public demonstration over Piccadilly when Castrol House shows — in terms of design if not traffic engineering — how easy it is to achieve competence'.[9]

And the next year the same journal enthused:

> 'Castrol House has already become a landmark in the Marylebone Road ... providing a shining contrast to most of the heavy and pompous buildings which line this thoroughfare. It provides the required accommodation in a building of soaring lightness ... One of the most elegant and sophisticated prestige buildings to appear in central London in recent months'.[10]

The London Society, critical of some schemes for tall buildings, expressed the view that quality of design and materials could make all the difference:

> 'If you put up any kind of high building it is bound to be seen and commented upon. It can never be hidden away, and if the workmanship is of poor quality everyone will know about it. Among the high buildings which have gone up in London recently there are many excellent examples of design and detailing from which to choose. One of them, Castrol House in Marylebone Road, is a model of simplicity, elegance and precision. The marble used in the panels of the lower block is particularly striking. The whole building gives an impression of quality and workmanship'.[11]

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8 Nairn 1964

9 *Architects' Journal* (1959), 570

10 *Architects' Journal* 1960, 479–80.

11 *The Journal of the London Society* 1960, 20

Fig. 2 Castrol House, Marylebone Road, NW1, by Gollins, Melvin, and Ward, with Casson and Conder, 1957–59.

2
NEW ZEALAND HOUSE

COORDINATES

Address:	*Haymarket, City of Westminster, SW1*
Date:	*1959–63*
Architects:	*Robert Matthew, Johnson-Marshall & Partners (Partners in Charge, Robert Matthew and Maurice Lee, with Gordon Wilson of New Zealand)*
Engineers:	*Scott and Wilson, Kirkpatrick & Partners*
Height:	*Eighteen floors and penthouse, including four-storey podium with ground-floor mezzanine*

ACCOUNT

New Zealand House is a building either hated because of the way it impacts on the area around Trafalgar Square, or admired for its own sake as one of the purest of London's tall buildings, together with *The Economist* group.[12] In 1963, the *Architects' Journal* commented:

> 'Every so often a building is completed which can serve as a yardstick by which we can measure our architectural standards and conceptions. Such a building is New Zealand House. It is partly an office block, home for visiting New Zealanders and partly a symbol of Commonwealth pride. It may not be fair therefore to compare it with most commercial offices ... because of the high quality of the design'.[13]

New Zealand House's genesis was controversial. The LCC had not planned for a tall building so close to Trafalgar Square and Pall Mall, but the site is part of the Crown Estate and had immunity from controls, as had the New Zealand Government. Nevertheless the Crown Estate imposed a maximum height level, while the LCC and the Royal Fine Arts Commission engaged in a protracted squabble to reduce the original proposal for a large L-shaped tower to a simpler form. The end result was, as at Castrol House, a higher podium, this time with a more complex open roof profile than had originally been intended. The foundations were also complex as they involved the underpinning of the theatre next door, which was until 1959 proposed for demolition as part of the site. The design evolved over three years, between 1956 and 1959.

The result is not built to any prefabricated cladding system, and is a uniquely open and comparatively light pattern of continuous horizontal bands of clear glazing set behind deep stone sills. It was particularly commended for the quality of its office environment, with high levels of daylight, sophisticated air conditioning and low traffic noise.

12 For which, see Pevsner 1973, 650–51; Harwood and Saint 1991, 216–17; Jones and Woodward 2000, 258.

13 *Architects' Journal* (15 May 1963).

The internal arrangements are complex. The podium contains an open reception area and raised visitors' lounge and restaurant, above which are the embassy's offices and a small conference room. The High Commissioner and his deputies have offices on the third floor. Within this hierarchy, however, the spaces are inter-penetrating, designed to give views across and out of the building. The tower was also originally designed for embassy staff, with just six floors dedicated to leasing and with further conference suites on the seventeenth and penthouse floors. Again the original internal fittings were of unusually high quality, incorporating rimu marble from New Zealand, specially commissioned carpets, and generous internal courtyards that were richly planted.

The building was 'revisited' by the *Architects' Journal* in 1971, when it was found that the structure and finishes had worn well, but that the air conditioning and acoustics had proved troublesome. The venetian blinds that obscure much of the glazing for most of the year were part of the original design for controlling heat gain, imparting a sense of domesticity to the exceptionally pure design of the tower.

New Zealand House was widely admired when built, the chief objection being that a building so elegant could have profitably been made taller — a jib at the planners and arbiters of 'taste'. Ian Nairn considered that:

> '... it is in the exact centre of London; yet it does not break open any new vital views. This is not accident, but the result of most careful shaping and profiling. New Zealand House really does express its structure in the kind of way that the thirties always hoped for but rarely succeeded in. Columns visibly run through the building, set back from the glass corners; the floor slabs project beyond the glass wall, something which is a tremendous help in relating it to the select set of buildings around. No longer a glass box imposed on the surroundings, but a kind of vertical Athenaeum. Seen behind Carlton House Terrace, for example, it gives point to Nash's horizontal sweep of stucco rather than dominating it. The Royal Opera Arcade, which runs round one side, is being improved, not impaired, because it will now have shops on both sides instead of just one. The roof terrace provides the best high level view in the whole of central London'.[14]

More recently, the views of Edward Jones and Christopher Woodward might be taken as representing the rather less enthusiastic stance:

> 'it ... now seems more destructive than constructive, and remains isolated in a predominantly eighteenth- and nineteenth-century part of London. The podium breaks Haymarket's cornice-line at an important corner where it would be better strengthened, and the tower acquires and unwaranted importance in views, especially from Trafalgar Square'.[15]

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15 Jones and Woodward 2000, 256.

- *Architects' Journal* (10 March 1971).
- *Architectural Review* (July 1963).

Fig. 3 New Zealand House, Haymarket, City of Westminster, by Robert Matthew, Johnson-Marshall & Partners, 1959–63.

3
MILLBANK TOWER

COORDINATES

Address:	*(Formerly Vickers Tower) Millbank, City of Westminster, SW1*
Date:	*1960–62*
Architects:	*Ronald Ward & Partners*
Engineer:	*G. W. Kirkland of Travers Morgan and Partners*
Height:	*387 feet (118m); Thirty-one-storey tower on three-storey podium, with eight-storey office block and eleven-storey residential tower*

ACCOUNT

The Thames was early identified by the LCC as a suitable location for tall buildings, though there was concern that Vickers might dominate the Houses of Parliament. Subsequently, however, it was its appearance in views down St James's Street that were the cause of criticism. The success of the building is the shape and composition of the tower, the combination of convex and concave shapes with Britain's first projecting stainless steel mullions giving endless interplay of light and shade, particularly in the way they reflect light off the water. The 'diabolo' form was conceived to correspond with the original eccentric plan for the lifts and was retained after this was modified. The tower was also among the first, along with Centre Point and Britannic House, to experiment with entasis. The lower blocks are less successful, although the eight-storey office block has a sympathetic curve that groups well. The separate residential tower, included to give an extra fillip to the plot ratio (3.5:1) has been reclad. At 387 feet (118m) it was London's tallest tower until the completion of that for the GPO in 1965.[16]

As at Castrol House, the construction is of reinforced concrete on piled foundations, with steel and glass cladding, the whole intention for the building to be as light as possible. The clients were the Legal and General Assurance Society, in conjunction with the Vickers Group, whose boardroom was on the top floor.

Contemporary critics tended to praise the tower while deploring its setting. Today we can best agree with the *Architect and Building News* that the dull reaches of Millbank and the Albert Embankment are enlivened by the subtleties of its shape and cladding. Nairn called it 'the only London skyscraper to have the clean zest and elan, literally sky-reaching and skyscraping, of the best in New York'.[17] Yet Jones and Woodward are rather less enamoured, suggesting that the tower's 'irregular plan form stands awkwardly on its podium, and its great mass has no positive order, either vertically or horizontally'.[18]

16 Below, no. 5.

17 Nairn 1964.

18 Jones and Woodward 2000, 339.

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Fig. 4 Millbank Tower, formerly Vickers Tower, City of Westminster, SW1, by Ronald Ward & Partners, 1960–62.

4
LONDON HILTON

COORDINATES

Address:	*London Hilton, 22 Park Lane, City of Westminster, W1*
Date:	*1960–63*
Architects:	*Lewis Soloman, Kaye & Partners*
Clients:	*New City Properties Ltd (Charles Clore), and Hilton Hotels International*
Consultant Architects:	*William B. Tabler of New York*
Structural Engineers:	*W.V. Zim and Associates*
Contractors:	*Token Construction Limited*
Height:	*328 feet (100m)*

DESCRIPTION AND DEVELOPMENT HISTORY

The London Hilton occupies a one-acre (0.4ha) island site bounded by Park Lane (southern end), Hertford Street, Stanhope Row and Pitts Head Mews, opposite Hyde Park. With a plot ratio of 6:1, the Hilton comprises a twenty-nine-storey tower rising to 328 feet (100m) above street level, with a two-storey podium forming the entrance in Park Lane. There are four storeys below ground, including parking space for 360 cars. The tower is built on a Y-plan, with wings of 70 feet (21m) in length and spine corridors serving rooms on either side, each with a view over London. The method of construction was the steel column beam and concrete floor slab construction. The exterior walls were faced with reconstructed Portland stone which framed the vertical strips of dark green glazing on the bedroom wings. The speed of construction was significantly increased once the decision had been made to dispense with piled foundations and build the tower on a steel reinforced concrete raft, the first tall building in London to be built by this method; the building was completed within three years. The roof restaurant was designed and decorated by Sir Hugh Casson, Conder and Partners, in 1963.

The London Hilton was designed and planned as early as 1957, and the tower was to have reached thirty-three storeys. Objections were raised by the Royal Fine Art Commission and a public inquiry was held in November of that year. At the inquiry, Mr Milner Holland QC for the sponsors argued that, since the war, many hotels in London had closed: 'We shall call evidence of the very grave shortage of hotel accommodation in London a small part of which the proposed hotel will do something to remedy'.[19] In May 1958 it was announced that Mr Brooke, minister for Housing and Local Government, would not allow the scheme as planned, but did not object to the principle of a high building there.[20] The architect changed the design twice, from a curved façade (1957), to a Y-plan with flat fronts terminating the wings (1959), to the Y-plan with curved balconies. The Royal Fine Art Commission continued to object to the siting of the building next to a Royal Park.

19 *The Times* (16 November 1957).

20 *The Times* (3 May 1958).

The London County Council's Planning Committee gave approval for planning permission in principle only, subject to the views of Westminster City Council, but recommending a reduced density.[21] They were nervous, perhaps, after considering favourably a proposal to erect a tower of 172 feet (52m) on the north side of Piccadilly Circus, rejected at public inquiry. Westminster City Council commented that the building was too tall but made no objection in principle. The LCC finally approved plans for the Hilton in March 1960, but limited the tower to twenty-nine storeys, the number of rooms was reduced from 700 to 529, and the plot ratio fell from 8:1 to 6:1. Demolition of offices, houses and a small block of flats on the site took place before work could begin in 1960, at the same time that Park Lane was converted into a dual carriageway by the sacrifice of a broad swathe of Hyde Park.

Charles Core was the developer of the tower, and Hilton International were the lessees, and were to run it as one of their many prestigious international hotels. Conrad Hilton flew in to finalize the deal with Clore, who commented: 'It has taken eight years to get through the negotiations and the planning authorities, but it is worth it'.[22] Clore was flush from his success with a development at Moor House, the first tall block to be developed along 'Route 11', London Wall, the post-war redevelopment of the north perimeter of the City. Moor House, an eighteen-storey office block begun in 1957 and completed in 1960, was financed by Clore, designed by architects Lewis Soloman, Kaye and Partners, and built by contractors Token Construction Company.[23] It was described at the time as 'the matchbox on a muffin'. The same team built the Hilton. The architects also submitted the winning design for the Euston Tower — 400 feet (121m) — and the surrounding development along the Euston Road. This was in 1962, following the widening of this important arterial road. The LCC approved this scheme, seeing the advantage in the cost of acquiring land being borne by the developer, and the scheme was built in the following ten years.

Contemporary Comment

The *Architectural Review* commented 'the most ambitious of London hotel projects, the Hilton has required eight years of negotiation and buying out of 170 miscellaneous interests'.[24] *Country Life* feared that there would be 'too much congestion in the area and that the bulk would obliterate the amenity values of Hyde Park and Mayfair'.[25] But the two most common complaints about the proposed hotel were proximity to the Royal Park, and its Americanism. On the former, the Royal Fine Art Commission was vociferous in its plea to halt insensitive siting if high buildings:

> 'We have deplored their effect on Royal Parks, where each new addition on the perimeter further defines and restricts the sense of space, their domination of small scale developments, and their destruction of many an important skyline'.[26]

21 *The Builder* (26 July 1959).

22 *The Times* (21 March 1960).

23 For which, see Bradley and Pevsner 1997, 542–43.

24 *Architectural Review* (October 1960), 302.

25 *Country Life* (4 July 1957).

26 Royal Fine Art Commission 21st Report (Aug 1968–Sept 1971), 12.

In 1961 the Commission objected to the proposed tower for Kensington barracks, and, after it had been built, commented:

> 'The Commission has never changed its view (that) skyscrapers around the perimeter of the Royal parks have a disastrously diminishing effect upon them. This can now all too well be seen to be true. The Commission has opposed not only this tower but those of the Hilton and the Royal Lancaster Hotels'.[27]

The Royal Fine Art Commission summarized its position on high buildings in a report in 1962:

> 'As is well known we have accepted very high buildings where in our view they were rightly situated and their architectural treatment was worthy of their prominence. We have opposed them where these conditions were not fulfilled. Examples of those which we have rejected are the *new hotel in Park Lane, New Zealand House* at the bottom of the Haymarket, *Portland House* on the Stag brewery site and the commercial buildings south-east of Cavendish Square. Completion, or near completion, of these buildings affords the general public of an idea of how much is involved in the selection of suitable sites for very high buildings and in their design'.[28]

Under a subheading 'Dollar Architecture', the 'Astragal' column of the *Architects' Journal* of 24 April 1963 railed:

> 'The *AJ* was complaining the other week about the Vickers tower, but the harmonica-cluster of the Hilton Hotel is the largest architectural disaster to hit London so far. By all accounts Hilton hotels abroad are not too bad, in a brash American way, so why should we in particular be inflicted with such a vulgar design? Why did Hilton — or was it developer Clore — feel impelled to use a firm of British architects whose buildings are largely unknown and certainly unremarkable apart from the dreary Bowmaker House in St James's Street? After all Americans are supposed the be able to teach us a thing or two about high buildings'.[29]

The commentary continued:

> 'Remember some people put up a fight against the Hilton design. The LCC rejected it, and the Royal Fine Art Commission supported the council. They were both overruled by tasteless, insensitive thugs at the Ministry of Housing. And what prompted this? Rumour says (and it will be years before the truth comes out, if ever) that the dollar-hungry Board of Trade browbeat the ministry. So for generations to come part of Mayfair and Park Lane will be dominated by one of the crudest towers Astragal can recall seeing in the last ten years. Can anyone name a worse? What won't we do for a mess of pottage? And home-brewed pottage at that, as a final indignity'.[30]

Indeed, the Board of Trade had been very supportive of the general idea of a large hotel in the area, and reckoned that it would bring in $30 million.[31] Interestingly,

27 Ibid., 27.

28 Royal Fine Art Commission 18th Report (Sep 1960–Aug 1962), 9.

29 *Architects' Journal* (24 April 1963), 858.

30 Ibid., 858.

31 *The Times* (3 July 1957).

apart from the use of American consulting architects, there was another American connection. In the early 1960s Charles Clore and his partner Jack Cotton, of the infamous Piccadilly scheme, were also financing the Pan Am building in Manhattan, New York. Next door to this building the Hotel Americana was going up, and, at fifty storeys high, would have dwarfed its contemporary in London.[32]

On the issue of Americanism, Nikolaus Pevsner was to write twenty years later:

> 'The skyscraper has become the most urgent visual problem of London. It has already changed the skyline radically, and not for the better. This is the americanization of the English townscape and it is too late to do much about it'.[33]

Not all comment was adverse criticism. The *Concrete Quarterly* noted:

> 'Whether one is in agreement with the siting and silhouette of this gleaming new tower in Park Lane or not — and most Londoners seem to like it — there is no doubt that it provides a badly needed point of cohesion in the traffic wilderness outside ... at least something clean and positive has come out of the chaos. Viewed for the first time from Park Lane, the impact of so many convex balconies disappearing one above the other into the sky is undeniably powerful'.[34]

This sentiment was echoed in the *Daily Mail* in 1960:

> 'This week conditional approval has been given to Mr Charles Clore's 29 storey hotel in Park Lane. In such work the prosperity of Britain is reflected, and in London the tempo of building is one of the nations strongly beating pulses. It will be a welcome day when the entire skyline seen from the monument has a fresh array of landmarks. For a growing city is a healthy city; and London's most significant sign to the world of its prosperity will be that its buildings continue on the up and up'.[35]

The *Illustrated London News* published a drawing of the view through the plate glass window of the restaurant and wrote approvingly:

> 'Each age creates the architecture it needs. With the population of London growing by leaps and bounds it will be necessary to build upwards if we maintain the predicted growth rate'.[36]

Also pro-Hilton was architect Ian M. Leslie, who commented in a lecture to The London Society in 1969:

> 'For one I don't object to high buildings, in fact, I like them so long as they are well designed, and importantly well-sited. Unfortunately not all of them are. Centre Point is a very good building but could hardly have been worse placed ... Nor do I object to the two hotels around the periphery of Hyde Park, the Hilton and the Royal Lancaster. Much as one would wish to retain the rural atmosphere of the

32 *The Observer* (13 May 1962).

33 Pevsner 1976, 157.

34 *Concrete Quarterly* (April–June 1963), 11.

35 *Daily Mail* (30 March 1960).

36 *Illustrated London News* (27 July 1963), 131.

parks, I just don't think it is on'.[37]

Effect on Policy

In February 1962 the Georgian Group issued a statement, 'High Buildings in London'. In the same month there was a parliamentary debate on the subject in the House of Lords. In the latter, the case of the Hilton was specifically referred to by Lord Brabazon, who addressed Lord Jellicoe:

> 'Does he remember (I am sure he does) that this Hilton outrage was barred by the London County Council and by the Royal Fine Art Commission? And then, if you please the Minister comes along and encourages it. Has the government an interest in the Hilton hotel? What was the reason for this outrage? It offends everything that anybody has laid down today by its proximity to the Royal Palace and nearness to the Park. I hope that your Lordships are not impressed with the Minister's general defences: they are very poor'.[38]

The main points that emerged from the debate and the Georgian Group statement was that there should be stricter control over the siting of the high buildings, and that the policy of judging each application on its merits was not sufficiently strong to prevent high buildings being inappropriately sited. The Georgian Group urged:

> 'The only sensible course is to formulate, albeit only in outline, the part that high buildings could, and should, play in the London townscape and the administrative changes necessary'.[39]

The immediate impact in 1962 was to cause the 'Kensington Green' scheme, three high towers proposed for Knightsbridge, to be rejected. However, the Kensington barracks tower on the south side of Hyde Park was successful, as no changes to the legislation were immediately forthcoming.

Subsequent Alterations and Comment

The Hilton is one of the landmarks of the capital, and is undoubtedly successful. Originally a flagship property of Hilton International, the building was sold to Ladbrokes in 1987. The 446-room, five star luxury hotel was completely refurbished in 1994. On the exterior the cladding and windows were replaced by Hunter and Partners. Inside, some rooms have been combined to form larger suites; each room has satellite television and in-house movie facilities, and 24-hour room service. It was recently voted 'No 1 Business hotel in the UK' by *Business Traveller* magazine. It has twelve meeting rooms, a grand ballroom which doubles as a conference room for 1,000 delegates. The main restaurant is still on the top floor, with four others, a health club, shops and salons. The location in Mayfair in central London between the West End and Knightsbridge is clearly crucial to its success as London's top hotel, as well as a large number of overseas visitors, the lack of which in recent weeks (autumn 2001) has caused great concern to the

37 Extract from lecture on Modern Architecture by Ian M. Leslie, OBE, published in *The Journal of the London Society* (March 1969), 8.

38 Hansard: House of Lords official report Volume 237, No 40, Column 833–44.

39 The Georgian Group, *High Buildings in London* (February 1962).

managers of the Hilton. But it has never been acclaimed as a distinguished work of architecture. In 1963, Michael Manser commented that the verticals and horizontals fought with each other. In 1973, the revised edition of the *Buildings of England* commented on the Hilton: 'Not architecturally outstanding as the Hilton hotel at Istanbul, or even as clean and sleek as the Hilton Hotel in Berlin. It is all a great pity'.[40]

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40 Pevsner 1973, 616.

Fig. 5 London Hilton, Park Lane, City of Westminster, W1, by Lewis Soloman, Kaye & Partners, 1960–63.

5
POST OFFICE TOWER

COORDINATES

Address:	*Post Office Tower, Cleveland Mews, London Borough of Camden, W1*
Date:	*1961–65*
Architects:	*Ministry of Public Buidlings and Works, Architects Department. Chief Architect: Eric Bedford; Senior Architect: G. R. Yeats*
Engineers:	*Senior Structural Engineer: S. G. Silhan; Senior Mechanical and Electrical Engineer: J. J. Taylor; Post Office Engineer: Kenneth Holloway*
Contractors:	*Peter Lind & Co. Ltd*
Client:	*General Post Office*
Height:	*582 feet (177m)*

HISTORY

The Post Office Tower — variously called the Museum Radio Tower, the GPO Tower, the British Telecom Tower, and now known as the Telecom Tower — was originally planned in 1954–55, and was designed as a centre of national and international telephone communication by ultra high frequency (UHF) microwave transmission. Telephone use had soared in the 1950s, and was correctly predicted to increase still more quickly in the 1960s, and it had become increasingly difficult to provide adequate cable links in central London. In addition, there was a need to extend television services for both entertainment and industrial purposes. The tower was designed to answer these problems, and would use high frequencies for the first time on such a massive scale.

The site, just off Tottenham Court Road, was chosen for a number of reasons. Most importantly, the adjacent Museum Telephone Exchange was already the focal point of the telecommunications system and the vision cables network for London, and had a cable connection to the BBC's nearby Broadcasting House. The height of surrounding buildings was also considered; the microwave beams could not function fully if they met interference, and so the tower needed to be placed on a site where the beams could clear the tallest office buildings and suburban hills. Furthermore, there was a vacant plot, and Eric Bedford apparently stated that 'the one place the amenity people could not defend on the grounds of architectural beauty was Tottenham Court Road'.[41]

Models of the tower first appeared in the architectural press in the late 1950s, though it was only in mid-1961 that the present, more functionally expressed design was published and gained the approval of the Royal Fine Arts Commission. Initially, the building was going to rise to 100 feet (30m) less than now, but its

41 'Radio Campanile', *Architectural Review* (August 1965), 123.

height was increased twice, 50 feet (15m) each time, as building commenced. This was in response to other high buildings being constructed in London — the Vickers Tower and the Hilton, for example — which it was vital should not interfere with the tower. The aerials and transmitters which the building carried had to be mounted between 365 and 475 feet (111 and 145m) up, in order to achieve adequate ground and obstacle clearance. Almost all of the other details of the tower's form and dimensions were determined by specific requirements. Its main feature, a sleek reinforced concrete cylinder constructed around a tapered shaft, enabled signals to be transmitted though 360 degrees, whilst the positioning of the aerial units demanded a diameter of about 50 feet (15m). The circular profile was retained in the remainder of the tower, 'to maintain consistency of form and to provide minimum wind resistance'.[42]

The tower was carefully considered for its elegance, and was divided into four main sections. The lowest section rises 115 feet (35m) above ground and, at the level of about 80 feet (24m), is connected via a bridge and stabilising link to the main exchange. The next section, totalling four-fifths of the tower's height and enclosed with glass cladding, is composed of seventeen floors, the lowest three containing the main ventilation and refrigeration plant, and the remainder housing the microwave apparatus. The third section carries the aerial galleries ('the basic reason for the whole tower'),[43] which were left open in order to minimize interference with the beams. The fourth and highest section contains observation floors, restaurant, cocktail bar, and kitchen. Above was placed a mast which carried radar used by the London Weather Centre. The restaurant, a feature of the design only introduced in 1961, revolved once every twenty-five minutes. It was part of a movement across North America and central Europe in favour of landmark restaurants connected with radio masts. The comparable, slightly earlier television towers at Stuttgart (opened 1956) and Dortmund (1959), for example, both had revolving restaurants, though the Space Needle at the Seattle World's Fair (opened 1962) was principally a place of entertainment.

The total cost of the project, including the extension to the Museum exchange, was around £2.5 million. The tower's waves were relayed across Britain via a series of masts, the nearest being at Harrow.

Contemporary Comment

When the tower was completed in 1965, it became London's tallest building and, as such, immediately caused a sensation. Descriptions of it included the 'modern Tower of Babel', whilst it was known by those who worked in it as 'the Stick'.[44] Because the building was so much a solution to technical problems, one contemporary journal considered it 'almost presumptuous for mere architects to comment or question'.[45] The tower was described, furthermore, as 'an engineering dominated building. Its main features are determined by the physical laws of the earth, and in spite of the restaurant, human life and movement are not strongly

42 *Architect & Building News* (5 May 1966), 940.

43 'The Post Office Tower', *Journal of the London Society*, **377** (December 1966), 109.

44 'GPO Tower', *Architects' Journal* (22 June 1966), 1542; 'Tower to the People' (30 June 1995): see RIBA High Buildings file.

45 'GPO Tower', *Architects' Journal* (22 June 1966), 1542.

evident'.[46] One of the tower's engineers, Kenneth Holloway, emphasized that it 'was not built primarily as an ornament or an amenity to London, but has an urgent social purpose'.[47]

A foreign writer, considering tall buildings in Britain in 1966, saw the tower in two lights: 'The slender tower can be enjoyed when viewed against the greenery of Regents Park or seen as a disturbing reminder of the power of 20th-century technologies to impose themselves upon the enclosures of human scale below'.[48] However, comments were on the whole extremely positive. An article in the *Architectural Review* stated that the tower:

> '... has to a quite extraordinary degree given back to the London skyline the self-respect which it had virtually surrendered before the ziggurats of Mammon. Its great achievement lies in its unexpected arrival in gaps and crevices of the street fabric throughout central London'.[49]

In going so far as to compare the building to Wren's City church spires, the writer goes on to say:

> '... once again the supposedly soulless forms of modern technology have emerged as vital successors to the humanist-classical tradition'.[50]

Photographs show the building in relation to Tower Bridge, Primrose Hill, Regent's Park, the Houses of Parliament, St Paul's Cathedral and other buildings, and it comes off surprisingly favourably. For example, 'in the superb view from Tower Bridge, the Post Office tower perfectly balances the Monument on either side of St Paul's dome', whilst in Fitzroy Square 'the whole campanile sits with perfect dignity on the south side's façade designed by Robert Adam — a final proof of Eric Bedford's successful integration of technology and humanism, in a London skyline badly in need of it'.[51] The *Architects' Journal*, too, despite some criticism, described the tower as 'so powerful a marker that it would be successful in most situations', and concludes that 'the massing is a very welcome addition to the urban landscape'.[52]

The revolving restaurant and public galleries were — as was envisaged — a particularly popular attraction. In 1966, the tower was accommodating an average of around 3,000 visitors a day, though on one occasion a maximum of 5,800 was reached.[53] It opened from 9.30am until around 10pm and offered unrivalled views of the metropolis. In the five years the public galleries were open (1966–71), a total of 4,632,822 people enjoyed the experience, reaching the top of the tower via the fastest lifts in Europe.[54] The revolving restaurant, aptly named the 'Top of the

46 Ibid., 1537.

47 'The Post Office Tower', *Journal of the London Society*, **377** (December 1966), 108.

48 Professor A. Ling, 'Tall Buildings in Britain', *The Architect (Perth)* (December 1966), 33.

49 'Radio Campanile', *Architectural Review* (August 1965), 123.

50 Ibid., 124.

51 Ibid.

52 'GPO Tower', *Architects' Journal* (22 June 1966), 1542–43.

53 'The Post Office Tower', *Journal of the London Society*, **377** (December 1966), 115.

54 'Tower to the People' (30 June 1995): see RIBA High Buildings file.

Tower' and run by Billy Butlin, was extraordinarily popular despite high prices, and offered an 'unforgettable dining experience'. By the time it opened in 1966, 2,000 people had already written in for reservations.[55] In 1962, a writer with the *Architect & Building News* looked forward to finishing his soup and fish 'before the Hilton swings into view'.[56]

Recent and Current Comment

The Post Office Tower has been the property of British Telecom since 1984, and is now accessible only to the company's staff and guests. The viewing galleries were closed after a bomb exploded on the thirty-first floor in October 1971, and the restaurant was closed in June 1980. The interiors have been entirely refurbished.

The most recent comments in the press have centred around the tower's closure to the general public. Hence, 'BT has turned a unique public attraction into a corporate-entertainment hang-out', wrote one journalist in 1995.[57] This may be taken as a measure of the building's popularity. Certainly, despite some adverse comment (Charles Price, former American Ambassador to the Court of St James, for example, offered to pay for vines to be trained up the tower in order to disguise it),[58] the building remains an architectural icon, and is as symbolic of the London skyline as St Paul's or Big Ben. The tower was recommended for listing at grade II in December 2000.

At over 580 feet (177m) high, the building is now the fourteenth highest in the world. At one point, it was thought that the tower would severely control the heights of future buildings which might interfere with its efficiency, but this has never been the case.

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55 Ibid.

56 *Architect & Building News* (21 November 1962), 744.

57 'Tower to the People' (30 June 1995): see RIBA High Buildings file.

58 Ibid.

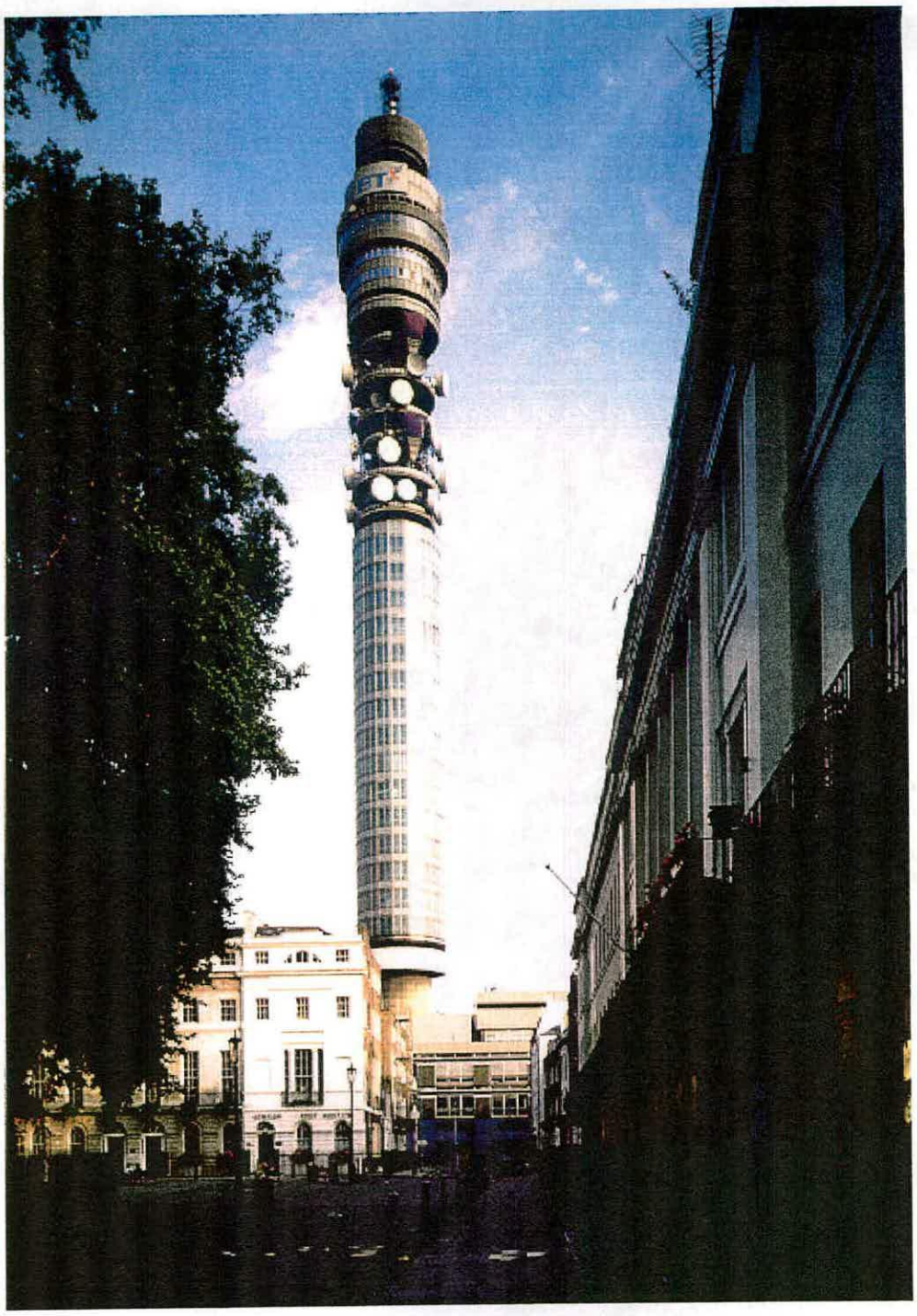

Fig. 6 Post Office Tower, Cleveland Mews, Camden, W1, by Ministry of Public Buildings and Works, Architects Department, 1961–65.

6
CENTRE POINT

COORDINATES

Address:	*St Giles's Circus, London Borough of Camden, W1*
Date:	*1961–66*
Architects:	*Richard Seifert & Partners: Partner in charge, George Marsh; Architect in charge, Roland Saillard*
Contractors:	*George Wimpey & Co Ltd*
Client:	*Speculative*
Developer:	*Harry Hyams's Oldham Estates*
Height:	*385 feet (117m)*

HISTORY

The development of Centre Point stemmed from the desire of the London County Council to create a gyratory system or roundabout at St Giles' Circus.[59] The area was considered suitable for comprehensive redevelopment in the 1950s, but because of the difficulty in acquiring leases the LCC decided in July 1956 to concentrate on just improving the road. In October 1959 it was reported that the LCC had still been unable to acquire all the necessary leases because of litigation, but that an alternative solution had presented itself. An application had been made to develop the proposed traffic island and the adjoining site, bounded by New Oxford Street, Earnshaw Street and St Giles' High Street. The proposal was for a twenty-nine storey office block and bridge over the road containing a restaurant. The proportion of offices, flats, shops and showrooms roughly reflected the existing use of the site. The use of the first floor bridge and the podium over the shops has always been limited by the LCC's refusal to allow offices there. The applicant was the architect Richard Seifert (1910–2001), 'on behalf of clients'. These were Sovmots Investments Limited, a subsidiary of Oldham Estates, the firm run by the notorious property developer Harry Hyams. There were reasons behind Hyams's choice of architect; Seifert was widely known to be a master at negotiating the planning system, and there was a panoply of legislation attendant on the redevelopment of such a prominent site. Seifert's project architects were his design partner, H. George Marsh, who signed all of the drawings, and Roland Saillard. A formal planning application was lodged on 12 August 1959, and permission was granted in November of the same year.

In April 1960 the LCC insisted that all the roads forming the roundabout should be at least fifty feet wide, making the central island smaller. Seifert agreed to reduce the length and width of his tower in return for an extra storey on the bridge and an extra two storeys on the tower. Somehow in 1959–60 another storey was agreed, and two more, one containing a gallery and one more open to the air, were agreed in

59 This and the following two paragraphs are based on Elain Harwood's report on Centre Point, September 1989. See English Heritage HA&RT file: Cam 232.

1962 when it was proposed to install air conditioning. The restaurant was moved from the bridge to the thirty-first and thirty-second floors, linked by an internal stair. The ultimate height of the tower was 385 feet. The road widening also altered the axis of the tower in relation to the lower block to the east. This block was raised to nine storeys and contained thirty-six flats. The forecourt pool with its 'mushroom' fountains was an integral part of the scheme from 1960 and Seifert insisted that it be made as large as possible. In June 1961 the Town Planning Committee of the LCC approved the siting and massing of the scheme.

The lower block was to include a bank at one end and a public house at the other, to replace buildings formerly on the site. To facilitate the transfer of the banking premises the LCC agreed that building could begin on this site before the tower site was cleared, and planning permission was granted for the podium and bridge on 9 July 1962. On 11 December 1962, Seifert submitted a revised scheme for the tower. An LCC Committee paper advised that 'this design is considered to be a great improvement on that previously submitted. It introduces a much stronger element of modelling into the large area of the main faces than was proposed previously'.[60] The tower was granted planning permission on 28 January 1963.

Work began on Centre Point in 1961 with the laying of 128 piles, 85 feet (26m) deep, capped by a raft. The building's styling was a response to its materials, which in turn were indicated by the difficult site. Centre Point was the first tall building to be erected without the use of scaffolding, made impossible by the constant stream of people and traffic in the restricted surrounding streets and the narrowness of the pavements. Apart from the lift shafts, the entire wall and floor construction was of pre-cast concrete, which increased the pace of erection. The external mullions, in the form of an 'H' on its side (not, as is usually claimed, of an inverted 'Y' shape), were placed from the inside using telescopic cranes, building progressing at a rate of one storey every five days. The system of 'H' shaped mullions, fixed around the ends of the concrete floors and bolted, allowed for thermal expansion, and guttering was inserted into the joints to prevent staining. As normal facing materials such as glass, metal, or stone had to be fixed from the outside, a new material was found: capstone, washed river stone which 'polishes like marble and always keeps clean'.[61] The mullions had some load bearing function, and the sculptural form as a whole was seen as a means of reducing air turbulence.[62]

The structure of the tower was completed by 1964, though the certificate of practical completion was dated November 1966. The finished development consisted of a main element — the thirty-five storey tower — joined to a nine-storey block of shops, offices and maisonettes by a 170 feet (52m) long glazed link at first-floor level. The tower — then London's second-highest building after the Post Office Tower — was raised off the ground on 'pilotis', a device favoured by Le Corbusier. Its ground floor was clad in ceramic mosaic and polished granite, and fronted onto a landscaped area with pool and fountains. The tower was of a slender design, bowed slightly on each face, and indented at each end. At the top was placed a viewing gallery, while a basement provided parking on two levels for at least 150 vehicles.

60 English Heritage HA&RT file: Cam 232, report, September 1989, 2.

61 *The Sunday Times* (15 May 1966); see RIBA file on high buildings.

62 Report by Elain Harwood, April 1991. See English Heritage HA&RT file: Cam 232.

Lift shafts and service ducts were placed at either end to leave undivided uniform floor areas (important for letting), and to provide wind-bracing.

CONTEMPORARY COMMENT

The controversy surrounding Centre Point increased as the building grew in height. Its central position, dominating vistas along Tottenham Court Road, Oxford Street, Charing Cross Road and other neighbouring thoroughfares, was a point of particular critcism. The editor of *Building*, Ian Leslie, described the tower in a lecture of 1969 as 'a very good building', though it 'could hardly have been worse placed'.[63] He questioned its practicality: 'what will happen when the building comes to be let, and 4,000 or 5,000 additional office workers flood into the tube station of an evening, I hardly dare contemplate'.[64] This latter point had been made as early as 1964, when *The Architects' Journal*'s gossip columnist, Astragal, commented that:

> 'The most staggering thing about that Seifert skyscraper at the corner of Charing Cross Road and Oxford Street is that until last week nobody apparently had the faintest idea that it was going on and on and up and up to forty storeys. The planning aspects of crowding all those layers of office workers, to join in the rush hour scrum twice daily at that desperation corner, on that postage stamp sized site must make one ask what the LCC planning department and planning committee were up to when permission was given'.[65]

In 1969, Michael Webb, noted how Centre Point was almost exactly the same height as the Vickers Tower, Millbank, but 'seems much taller, being a slim slab that rises from the pavements of a busy traffic junction'.[66] Mrs Millie Miller, Labour leader of Camden Council, stated in 1972 that she would love Centre Point 'if it were somewhere else',[67] and John Chisholm felt that it 'should never have been built, but then neither should any other great tower have been constructed on the edge of Georgian Bloomsbury'.[68] In 1980, the point was still being made. A writer for *The Guardian* stated that 'Centre Point is not bland and indeed, in another place where it would be less dominating, Seifert's clever handling of the standard precast concrete frame which modulates all the faces might have been more often praised'.[69] On a more general note, many of Seifert's buildings are said to 'positively destroy the physical environment in which they stand'.[70]

Although Centre Point was rejected for an award by RIBA assessors, its design was widely acclaimed, and parallels were quickly drawn between the tower and Ponti and Nervi's Pirelli Tower in Milan (begun in 1959). In 1965, an article described the development, 'which has shot into the air to produce one of London's most attractive office towers'.[71] Four years later, Michael Webb described it as a

63 *Journal of the London Society* (March 1969), 8.

64 Ibid.

65 *The Architects' Journal* (17 June 1964), 1330.

66 Webb 1969, 144.

67 *Building Design* (14 July 1972), 8.

68 *Sunday Times Magazine* (13 February 1972); see RIBA biog file on Seifert.

69 *The Guardian*, Arts section (25 November 1980), 9.

70 Ibid.

71 *Evening Standard* (22 June 1965), 8; see RIBA biog file on Seifert.

development of 'unusual quality ... Its boldly modelled grid reads as well from a distance as close to, and the slight taper on each face prevents any feeling of top-heaviness'.[72] Eric Ambrose FRIBA found it 'one of the most interesting buildings in London ... It might well have been called a Turning Point, for this is what it may yet prove to be'.[73] In an oft-quoted statement, Erno Goldfinger termed Centre Point 'London's first pop art skyscraper' (apparently considered an insult by Seifert),[74] and *The Sunday Times* found that it appealed 'at a popular level ... a nice change, after all those boring glass and concrete boxes we've had since the war'.[75] Sir Hugh Casson, former President of the Royal Academy, described it as 'one of the most successful high buildings in London',[76] and in 1971 *The New York Times* recounted how Londoners 'seem to admire it'.[77] Comparisons were drawn between Richard Seifert and Christopher Wren, in terms of impact on London's scene and skyline, and Seifert became Britain's best-known architect. Even critics who found Centre Point not suited to their taste, recognized its importance. A detailed and lengthy 1968 article in *Building* was concluded thus:

> 'Whatever you think of Centre Point it belongs to the decade in which English youth finally asserted itself in supreme confidence above the mediocrity of the muddle through middle of the road mentality. Like the Beatles and Mary Quant, this building expresses the supreme confidence of sheer professionalism. It has transcended its original role as a building and taken on a much wider social aspect, you may not like it but you cannot ignore it. More than any other building Centre Point made London swing, it backed Britain, a product of real team work which must figure as an invisible export'.[78]

And, in a similar tone, *The Guardian* wrote:

> 'The Seifert style has ... spread through London like wildfire and has had a considerable impact on the post-war London scene. He, and those who have commissioned him, have had the courage to build for the future — an activity not to everyone's liking but realistic, adventurous, and, to those who work in the new buildings with their air conditioning, magnificent views over London, easy riding lifts, and spacious feel, producing something rather better than some of those sordid rabbit warrens and older box-like rooms that still exist beside them'.[79]

There were features of the design of Centre Point which drew criticism — most commonly, the tower's ground floor treatment and overall detailing — but it was its status as a speculative office building which made it notorious. Despite being marketed as 'the best known office building in the world',[80] Centre Point remained

72 Webb 1969, 144.

73 Eric Ambrose, 'The Sculptural Approach' (February 1968); see full article on RIBA biog file on Seifert.

74 *The New York Times* (12 June 1971), 31.

75 *The Sunday Times* (1966).

76 Ibid.

77 *The New York Times* (1971), 31.

78 'Centre Point: Symbol of the Sixties', *Building* (24 May 1968), 102.

79 Tom Allan, 'Offices and the Seifert Style', *The Guardian* (8 July 1971); see the RIBA biog file on Seifert.

80 *The Architects' Journal* (31 January 1973), 246.

totally unlet until November 1975. At the time, this was explained by Harry Hyams as being due, in part, to the building's design. Hyams blamed the tower's 'awkward plan shape' and stated that it was the GLC's refusal to let the top two floors change their use from catering and the lowest two from showrooms that had kept the building empty.[81] However, it is now common knowledge that the building was deliberately kept vacant; Hyams knew that the inflation-driven growth would vastly eclipse the cash flow advantage of an interim lease at a discount price, and Centre Point grew and grew in value. Seifert himself must have benefited — his holding in Oldham Estates increased from 500 shares in 1960 to 28,400 in 1971 — and his name was often linked in the press with that of Hyams. By 1972, the building had become a national scandal and Peter Walker, Secretary of State for Environment, told Parliament that 'Centre Point has remained empty for eight years. I believe that the time has come to end this highly undesirable practice'.[82] He threatened to buy Centre Point for the nation, something repeated by Prime Minister Harold Wilson in 1974. In the latter year, the tower was invaded by one-hundred squatters demonstrating about homelessness (the thirty-six maisonettes were still empty); seven policemen were hurt in the clash. One squatter described the building as 'the concrete symbol of everything that is rotten about our society',[83] and it was tp become a focus for the strong public feeling about the damage being done to Britain's cities by speculative development. Finally, in 1979 — the year that cracks began to appear in the tower — a tenant was found, the CBI (Confederation of British Industry), which agreed to rent fourteen floors and to contribute towards repairs.

Recent and Current Comment

Gradually, Centre Point has come to be accepted as one of London's major landmarks. The tower's architect, Richard Seifert, once again became major news in the early 1980s after the completion of his NatWest Tower (Tower 42). His work — so controversial in its day — was seen in a new light, and interest culminated in an exhibition at the Heinz Gallery in 1984. In January 1983, James Dunnett — an architect who had previously worked for Goldfinger — gave a lecture on 'Best Buildings' at the Architectural Association, and chose to talk about Centre Point. Reporting on the lecture, and approving of Dunnett's choice, Gavin Stamp wrote that 'surely, if one can separate the building from its polemical context and history, Centre Point is the most elegant and unobtrusive of London's tall buildings, and one which does comparatively little damage to that part of the city'.[84] Dunnett's lecture was characteristically mocked by Astragal, who noted how remarkable it was that anyone could talk about Centre Point as a building, as a three dimensional form, without referring to plot ratios, office floor plans and the property market.[85] Still, the lecture marked a turning point in the appreciation of Seifert and his work. In 1984, Simon Jenkins wrote of Centre Point being 'in a style which might come to be called Late-Jazz — it's certainly not Rock! The cantilevers, arches and lozenge-shaped patterns which he employed became the signature of the age and a

81 Ibid., 246.

82 MEPC's 'Centre Point: A Brief History'. See English Heritage HA&RT file: Cam 232.

83 Obituary on Seifert in *The Daily Telegraph* (29 October 2001), 23.

84 *Designer* (June 1984), 14.

85 Ibid., 14.

distinctive and recognizable style, unlike the anonymous glass, steel and concrete boxes produced by his contemporaries ... *some* of his work will merit preservation'.[86]

Meanwhile, there was further controversy over the building. In 1986, Camden Council made a compulsory purchase order on the thirty-six unlet flats in the Centre Point complex, a move rejected by the courts. The following year, Hyams sold the building to the international property company MEPC in a £516 million takeover. In 1989, the company's architects — Allies & Morrison — produced designs for an internal and external refurbishment of Centre Point in a three-year £30 million programme. Plans included building a new lobby under the tower and over much of the forecourt, and cladding both its ends for their full height with glazed enclosures housing additional lifts and service risers. This provoked more serious calls for Centre Point's preservation; one writer felt that it was 'almost, but not quite, akin to replacing Wren's west front of St Paul's with a façade of smoked glass'.[87] The Royal Fine Arts Commission, one of Seifert's most outspoken critics in the 1960s, called for Centre Point to be listed, and even compared the building's elegance to a Wren steeple.[88] James Dunnett once again came forward, saying that the building should be preserved as a monument to the Modern Movement.[89] In 1990, the tower was turned down for listing, though — to the great relief of many — the alterations never went ahead.

In 1995, Centre Point was reconsidered for listing, and this time the application was successful. The complex was listed at grade II, the description hailing Centre Point as 'one of the most important speculative office developments of its period in Britain'. Reactions were, on the whole, positive, though there were — and still are — some who consider the tower an eyesore. John Seifert, son of the architect, said of Centre Point: 'People were coming out of a period of considerable austerity. It was a symbol of the new world, everything was suddenly bigger, more open. It also reflected changes in the working world: the requirement for modern working conditions, air-conditioning, high-speed lifts, better working spaces. Centre Point has come back into its own again'.[90]

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86 *The Times* (21 November 1984), 15.

87 *The Independent* (21 February 1990), 19.

88 RIBA obituary: see RIBAWorld Issue (e-mail newsletter), 194.

89 *The Independent* (1990), 19.

90 *The Times* (25 November 1995); see the RIBA biog file on Seifert.

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- English Heritage HA&RT file: Cam 232.

Fig. 7 Centre Point, St Giles's Circus, Camden, W1, by Richard Seifert & Partners, 1961–66.

7
GOVERNMENT OFFICES MARSHAM STREET

COORDINATES

Address:	*Government Offices, 2 Marsham Street, City of Westminster, SW1*
Date:	*1963–71*
Architect:	*Eric Bedford (MOPBW) in association with Robert Atkinson & Partners*
Contractors:	*Bernard Sunley Ltd and M. J. Gleeson Ltd*
Client:	*Originally intended for the Departments of Housing, Local Government, and Education and Science, but used from 1972–95 as the headquarters of the Department of the Environment*
Height:	*200 Feet (61m)*

HISTORY

The former Department of the Environment offices occupy a rectangular site, covering around 5 acres (2ha), bordered by Great Peter Street (north), Monck Street (west), Horseferry Road (south) and Marsham Street (east). The history of the site is a complex one. In 1936, the architect Robert Atkinson (1883–1952) submitted designs for a new office block for the resident Gas Light & Coke Company (published in the *Architects' Journal* in 1942) and approval was given in principle.[91] Preparatory work began (including the demolition of the former offices) and was continued until 1940 when, with the start of the Second World War, the site was requisitioned for government purposes. The outer shells of two obsolete gas holders, the majority of which had been demolished in 1935–36, were used as part of the secret Whitehall underground defence system.[92]

In 1949, Robert Atkinson submitted another design for offices on the site, this time intended to house the Ministry of Housing and Local Government and the Department of Education and Science.[93] The buildings were of massive bulk and scale, with five pairs of lateral wings running at right-angles to the main axis, and were neo-Classical in style. It has been said that this design influenced the form of the present offices. Atkinson died in 1952, after a long design process and before any firm decision had been made. Work had, however, been started; a reinforced concrete two-storey basement was built at the south end of the site in 1950–52.

In the late 1950s, responsibility for the project was passed to Eric Bedford (1910–

91 *Architects' Journal* (14 May 1942), 344; Ed. Paul Spencer-Longhurst, *Robert Atkinson* (1989), 53.

92 See newspaper cuttings file (E138M) at Westminster City Archives.

93 Spencer-Longhurst (editor), *Robert Atkinson* (1989), 59.

2001), Chief Architect for the Ministry of Public Building and Works from 1950 until 1970, and best remembered as the man behind the Post Office Tower (opened 1966). Plans for the government offices were considered by Westminster City Council's Town Planning Notifications Sub-Committee in December 1959, with the result that there was 'no objection in principle'.[94] At this time, the buildings were described as 'three 20-storey tower blocks at right angles to Marsham Street', though their external appearance had not yet been finalized, and elevations were not made available. Around the same time, probably in late 1960, the plans were considered by the Royal Fine Arts Commission, who did not feel sufficiently strongly enough about the proposal to mention it in its bi-annual report.[95] No comment appears to have been made at this time by any architectural journal. One reason for the general acceptance of the scheme was presented by the *Architectural Review* in 1970, which stated that the offices 'slipped through the planning net under the iniquitous Section 100 procedure'.[96] Also, as a long-running and complicated scheme, it seems to have lost its immediate impact.

Construction began in 1964, and was supervised by Robert Atkinson & Partners. Design was dictated in a general way by pre-existing buildings on site, which were too bulky to be broken up. There were still the bases of the two reinforced concrete gas holders, whilst at the south end of the plot was the two-storey block built as part of the earlier Atkinson scheme. These were incorporated as foundations, two towers being placed on the rotundas, and one on the basement block. The main feature of the design were the three parallel slab towers, each of twenty storeys and rising to 200 feet (61m) in height. A four-storey, 50 feet (15m) high, podium connected the three towers and formed their outer perimeter, and from this, on the east (Marsham Street) side, five low wings projected towards the street. Between the towers were placed the kitchen block (to the north) and the switchroom block (to the south).

The method of construction was pioneering. The Ministry of Public Building and Works used the Marsham Street site as a test-case for its new Public Building Frame or System, designed with the Cement and Concrete Association specifically for large-scale, repetitive building projects. The towers were of a 'box-shell' construction, with an exposed framework of edge beams and mullions made of white capstone concrete. There was a combination of pre-cast and *in situ* work. The building's method of construction was featured in the *Architectural Journal* in 1966, and was discussed over twelve pages in the *Structural Engineer* in 1967.[97]

Finally, after a delay of two years caused by a wave of prolonged striking which hit the construction industry, the offices were opened in late 1971. Having been intended for the Departments of Housing, Local Government, and Education and Science — one department to occupy each tower — the officers of the newly created Department of the Environment now found themselves based in Marsham Street. This change in function was to make a nonsense of the building's design; there was a lack of unity, and staff had to resort to lifts and walks through the

94 Town Planning Notifications Sub-Committee (June–Dec 1959), report of 18 December.

95 Royal Fine Art Commission: 18th Report (September 1960–August 1962).

96 *Architectural Review* (November 1970), 338. This is seemingly a reference to the Town and Country Planning Act of 1967, section 100.

97 *Architects' Journal* (3 August 1966), 305–08; *Structural Engineer* (October 1967), 337–48.

building's three miles (4.4km) of corridors. In all, 2 Marsham Street cost £5.5 million, and totalled 650,000 square feet (60,386sq m), containing around 1,600 offices.

Contemporary Comment

Whilst the Government offices were still under construction, it became quite obvious that their design had been a mistake. In 1970, the *Architectural Review* included — under 'Continuing Disasters' — a photograph of the building in relation to the Houses of Parliament, only half a mile (0.7km) away, showing 'the skyline of Britain's major tourist asset (and to date the only universally loved Victorian monument) blotted out by an office building sponsored by the Government itself'.[98] In 1972, *Built Environment* termed the DoE headquarters 'arguably the worse large office building in London', its design 'a crude piling up of accommodation on the site'.[99] *Building Design*, reviewing the structure in 1972, described its sole redeeming feature as the patterned roofs of the podium 'designed to relieve the tower block gaze of upper storey dwellers and potential suicides'.[100]

Marsham Street was equally unpopular with its occupants. Peter Walker, the first minister to occupy the building, stated in 1992 that 'when I moved in 1971, I said, this is the perfect building for a Secretary of State for the Environment. It will teach him never to allow another one like it'.[101] With acres of glass and windows, the offices were steaming hot during the summer, and freezing cold in the winter. Sir John Redpath, an architect who was the DoE's director general of research and development in 1970, stated that the offices were 'an amorphous mess. We were always walking up and down. The loos were on every other floor'.[102] The workers themselves described 2 Marsham Street as 'remarkably hard to use'.[103]

However, these were comments made with the honesty of hindsight. At the time, the main criticism mentioned by the DoE spokesman was the problem — noted above — of movement between the three towers.[104] A civil servant who moved in soon after completion in 1971 has admitted that, though unpopular in more recent decades, the offices 'at the time ... seemed a great improvement on our previous accommodation'.[105] Ivor Lightman, a principal at the Ministry of Works, recalled that 'nobody thought it was pretty, but tower blocks were seen differently then'.[106] In 1992, the architect himself, Eric Bedford, defended the offices as 'a utilitarian building. We never said what we were producing was an architectural object, there was no money there'.[107] Bedford's brief was to house, as quickly and as cheaply as

98 *Architectural Review* (November 1970), 338–39.

99 'The Architecture of Compromise', *Built Environment* (October 1972), 450–51.

100 *Building Design* (14 January 1983), 1.

101 *The Daily Telegraph* (8 February 1992).

102 *Building* (14 February 1992), 9.

103 'Nightmare on Marsham St', *Financial Times* (17 December 1993).

104 *Building Design* (28 January 1983), 8.

105 *The Independent*, (7 February 1997).

106 *The Daily Telegraph* (8 February 1992).

107 *Building* (14 February 1992), 9.

possible, the maximum number of people under one roof, and no emphasis was laid on aesthetics. In this sense Bedford met his brief perfectly.

Recent and Current Comment

By 1990, 2 Marsham Street had been regularly voted London's most hated building, its nicknames including 'faulty towers' and the 'triple toast rack'. An article of 1983 was headed 'Mediocre Marsham Street', and described the building as 'a blot on the environment in whose defence it stands'.[108] Public comment reached its peak after the announcement in February 1992 that the DoE headquarters were to be vacated, the 3,000 workers relocated and the building demolished. The offices were suffering from spalling concrete, and a 1990 report by Arup Associates set the repair costs at a minimum of £50 million.[109]

Marsham Street had been violently disliked by a series of environment secretaries. According to John Gummer, it 'is staggeringly and revoltingly offensive. It is ugly, unsympathetic, unhygienic and unsafe ... It's the most depressing place I've ever worked in'.[110] Chris Patten termed it a 'building which deeply depresses the spirit,'[111] whilst Michael Heseltine 'found it ironic that we used to pass judgement on the aesthetic merits of planning applications while sitting in one of the capital's worst eyesores'.[112] Tom King was told he was lucky to be based in the offices as 'inside 2 Marsham Street is the one place you can't see your own building'.[113] Even the architect, Eric Bedford, stated that he was 'not at all sad to see it go. Everyone seems to dislike it'.[114]

There were questions as to why the offices had ever been allowed to be built in the first place. The answer usually given was that any building was seen as an improvement on a derelict gas works site. Though acknowledged by Nikolaus Pevsner and Bridget Cherry to be 'an honest and ruthlessly utilitarian statement',[115] and known as an icon of architectural brutality, 2 Marsham Street was voted by the RIBA 'one of London's disgraceful eyesores'.[116] Jonathan Clancey, architectural correspondent to *The Independent*, termed the building 'a Soviet-style homage to the concrete industry which has probably done more than any other major public building to destroy public confidence in modern architecture'.[117]

Perhaps the main objection to the current buildings is their adverse effect on the historic skyline of Westminster Abbey and the Palace of Westminster (a World Heritage Site), and the conservation areas of Vincent Square, Smith Square,

108 *Building Design* (14 January 1983), 1.

109 'Nightmare on Marsham St', *Financial Times* (17 December 1993).

110 'Nightmare on Marsham St', *Financial Times* (17 December 1993).

111 *Architectural Journal* (5 November 1990).

112 *Construction News* (31 August 2000).

113 *The Daily Telegraph* (8 February 1992).

114 *Building* (14 February 1992), 9.

115 Pevsner 1973, 511.

116 *Building* (14 February 1992), 9.

117 *The Independent* (7 February 1997).

Parliament Square and Medway Street. The towers have apparently been carefully edited out of the panoramas which open the ITN news, and a DoE release of 1994 boasted how 'the magnificent silhouette of the Houses of Parliament will be restored'.[118]

Plans for new buildings on the site began to be submitted in the mid-1990s, and planning permission was granted by the City Council in 1996–97 for the erection of a mixed use development. 2 Marsham Street is set to be demolished, and will be replaced by buildings designed by Terry Farrell, KP Architects and others to house the Home Office and the Prison Service, as well as including affordable housing and pedestrian streets. This development will rise to only a third to a half of the height of the present structure.

Conclusion

When 2 Marsham Street was completed in 1971, its design concept was already out of date. It had slipped past the planners in the late 1950s and early 1960s, before public debate surrounding the erection of tall, slab like buildings (particularly offices) had reached its climax. Still, it was not out of place in its time, but blended into the London skyline with other massive structures such as the nearby Vickers Tower on Millbank (1960–62).

Over the decades, the building's erection has emerged as an error of judgement, but it has not proved irreversible. The reduced height and bulk of the new development at 2 Marsham Street shows crucial lessons have been learned. Still, the Government offices are not likely to be missed by anyone, especially by the people who live and work in the nearby streets. 'Good riddance', said John Gummer, when he was asked in 1993 about the building's demolition.[119]

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118 Unpublished English Heritage Registry file on 2 Marsham Street development (LRS 8647/0).

119 'Nightmare on Marsham St', *Financial Times* (17 December 1993).

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Fig. 8 Government Offices, Marsham Street, City of Westminster, SW1, by Eric Bedford of the Ministry of Public Building and Works, in association with Robert Atkinson & Partners, 1963–71.

8
TOWER 42

COORDINATES

Address:	*Formerly the NatWest Tower, 25 Old Broad Street, City of London, EC2*
Date:	*1973–81*
Client:	*National Westminster Bank*
Architects:	*Richard Seifert & Partners*
Engineers:	*Pell Frischman and Partners*
Contractor:	*John Mowlem and Company Ltd*
Height:	*600 feet (183m)*

DESCRIPTION AND HISTORY OF DEVELOPMENT

At fifty-two storeys and 600 feet (183m) high, Richard Seifert's NatWest tower was the tallest tower in Britain when built, and remained so until Cesar Pelli's tower at Canary Wharf was erected in 1988–91.[120] The tower, erected on a raft supported by 375 piles, comprises a core wall of concrete from which the concrete floors are cantilevered. It is modelled as three overlapping half-hexagons with rounded corners, coincidentally similar in plan to the NatWest logo. The exterior appears sleek and slimline with close-set stainless steel fins emphasizing the vertical, and bronze-tinted glass between prefabricated elements. The wings that were to have flanked the tower at the lower level were not built, so that the tower rises from within the context of older buildings, including the listed Threadneedle Street bank to which it is linked, and the City of London Club,[121] for which there was a conservation struggle.

Although it was specifically designed for the bank, the NatWest tower has strong similarities with earlier speculative work by Seifert. For example, the reinforced concrete service core, from which a deep cantilever projects to carry all the floors above it, was used at the Tolworth Tower, Space House and Centre Point, all projects of the 1960s.

The planning of this project began in 1959 when the National Provincial Bank acquired a site to extend its Bishopsgate headquarters. It took seven years for the bank's own architects to gain outline planning permission to redevelop at a plot ratio of 5:1. The listed banking hall on the site was to be retained. The LCC granted planning permission, but the on the same day a law was passed prohibiting the approval of all office development projects without an Office Development Permit. The ODP was granted in 1968, by which time the National Provincial had merged to form the National Westminster Bank, and plenty of accommodation was needed. As the site was so small, building high seemed inevitable. Surprisingly, the

120 Bradley and Pevsner 1997, 575. Cabot House at Canary Wharf is 800 feet (244m) high: Jones and Woodward 2000, 402.

121 Bradley and Pevsner 1997, 574–75.

architects did not meet with opposition from the City planners, who had by then decided that 'they wanted a vertical point that would bind together the many high-rise office blocks that were then emerging in haphazard fashion in the City'.[122] The Royal Fine Art Commission approved the tower and lower buildings in 1968. Lord Esher wrote: 'The NatWest tower was voted to that height in an extraordinary plebiscite held in the Royal Exchange'.[123] This was in 1969; the GLC gave detailed planning approval in 1970, and construction began the following year. The project came to a temporary stop in 1974 when the Department of the Environment refused Listed Building Consent for the City of London Club, and Seifert had to make a deal to extend his planning permission for another four years. In order the preserve the club building, the lower development was not carried out. The NatWest tower was finished and occupied in 1981.

The bank moved out after a terrorist attack in 1993, but the building has recently been refurbished (1997) by GMW with a new three-storey glazed foyer and giant canopy in front. The tower was completely reclad with panellised curtain walling. Tower Partnership became the new owners in 1998. They have opened a restaurant and bar on the twenty-fourth floor, a cafe and shops on the ground floor, and renamed the building Tower 42.

Contemporary Comment

In general, the architectural press was remarkably sympathetic to the construction of the tower. *Building* considered it to be 'Britain's most exciting building for years'. Lord Esher enthused that the tower 'relieves the monotony without hurting the cathedral'. 'Upstream and down', he went on, 'outside this particularly sensitive reach, the towers unquestionably improve the river views and we could do with more of them'.[124] Other journals commented that they would have liked some public access, cafes or shops at street level, a viewing gallery or restaurant at the top. Some feared that when completed the tower would throw a shadow on St Paul's Cathedral, but in the event this has not been a concern. The building won the design award of the European Convention for Structural Steel Work in 1978.

Adverse criticism seems to have come later. Writing in 1986, Art Kutcher attacked the lack of control over the height, and sheds light over the public meeting in the Royal Exchange referred to by Lord Esher. Kutcher wrote:

> 'The weakness of the visual portion of the GLC's high building policy was demonstrated by the case of the National Westminster tower east of Old Broad Street. The GLC Architects' Department had serious reservations about the impact of a 600-ft high tower upon the views of the cathedral dome and requested the architects to prepare an alternative design composed of two shorter blocks. Unable to come up with any convincing method of evaluating the two schemes the GLC handed the problem over to the "public", leaving the decision to those people who happened to wander into a an exhibition presenting the photomontages of the two designs. As a result, the dominance which Wren's dome has held for 250 years over the great visual space of the Thames will be finally and decisively crushed by Colonel Seifert's tallest office

122 *Building* (23 January 1981), 39.

123 Esher 1981, 167.

124 Ibid., 167.

block'.[125]

Since then, of course, views of St Paul's are protected from eight vantage points shortly to rise to eleven, and new proposals for buildings over 250 feet (76m) will have to be approved by the Mayor for London and the Greater London Assembly, as well as other bodies, including English Heritage.

Recent Comment

The recent *Buildings of England* volume on the City of London commented: 'Only in long views does the tower have enduring success, as a bold focus and centrepiece for the City's lesser towers'.[126] The building will come forward for consideration for listing when it is thirty years old, in the year 2003.

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125 *Save The City* 1976, 161.

126 Bradley and Pevsner 1997, 575.

Fig. 9 Tower 42, formerly the NatWest Tower, Old Broad Street, City of London, EC2, by Richard Seifert & Partners, 1973–81.

9
CANARY WHARF TOWER (ONE CANADA SQUARE)

COORDINATES

Address:	*1 Canada Square, Canary Wharf, Marsh Wall, London E14*
Date:	*1988–91*
Architects:	*Cesar Pelli & Associates, with Adamson Associates and Frederick Gibberd Coombes & Partners*
Client:	*Olympia and York*
Structural Engineer:	*M. S. Yolles & Partners; Waterman Partnership*
Height:	*800 feet (244m)*

DESCRIPTION

Canary Wharf Tower is the centrepiece of an enormous, high density office and commercial development on the Isle of Dogs in the East End of London. The site is centred on the quay between the north and south docks of the former West India Docks, closed in 1970. Canary Wharf, used for fruit imports, gave its name to the whole site. The fifty-storey tower designed by American architect Cesar Pelli was, at 800 feet (244m), the tallest building in Britain and the second tallest in Europe when it was completed in 1991. Construction began in the spring of 1988 and the building was completed in 1991, after only three and half years, a remarkably short period for such a tall building. It was built at the same time as Cabot Place at the foot of the tower, with its neo-classical rotunda and glazed atrium, and the Canary Wharf Docklands Light Railway station (all by the same architects).

The tower is constructed of steel and concrete, clad in glass and stainless steel. It is the first skyscraper to be clad in stainless steel, at the architect's insistence. The steel, Patten Hyclad Cambric finish, was specially produced in Panteg, Wales. The steel ribs of the modular grid reflect the light, as the architect intended. The four faces project from the central rectangular tower, and stop four storeys short of the top, or rather the base of the pyramid, a perforated cap to the cooling towers. Pelli described it as 'a square prism with pyramidal top in the traditional form of the obelisk, which is the most archetypal way of creating a vertical architectural sign ... and the essence of the skyscraper'.[127] The elevation is articulated by a grid 10 feet (3m) wide, and in the centre of each grid panel is a large window of clear untinted glass. The steel walling is sheer to the base except for a band of triangular patterning above the two storey-high flush glazing round the base. The three-storey entrance lobby is clad in a combination of black, grey, red and green marbles from Turkey, Italy and Guatemala.

The cost of erection was just over £200 million. The building provides 1.3 million

127 SOL 1994, 714.

square feet (123,840 sq m) of office space, served by thirty-two passenger lifts divided into four banks, each serving a different section of the building. There are two freight lifts and two firemen's lifts. The lifts are fast, travelling from the lobby to the fiftieth floor in just 40 seconds. The tower can sway up to 1 foot 2 inches (0.35m) in the highest wind. It is an occupied office building and not open to the public.

Cesar Pelli, an Argentinian born New-Haven based architect who designed the World Financial Center in New York (not to be confused with the former World Trade Center), also for Olympia and York, said of his Canary Wharf design: 'It is the simplest, most pure, most basic form I have designed. It was important to me that it should be a skyscraper, not simply a high rise-building ... I wanted it to look un-American, to step outside the three main styles of Classical, Gothic and art deco'.[128]

In fact, Canary Wharf tower is remarkably similar in form and mass to his New York towers. Pelli would have preferred the tower to be taller and more slender, but the London Docklands Development Corporation had already laid down the rigid sizes for floor plans and heights. Five floors were consequently sliced off the top in order not to obstruct the nearby flight path into London City Airport. The Canadian clients Olympia and York were unwilling to lose any floor space because of this, and extra accommodation had to be added to the remaining floors. As a result, Pelli felt that the proportions of the block had suffered. No such modification has been made to Pelli's most recent commission, which has given him the distinction of being the architect for the tallest buildings in the world: the Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, completed in 1997. These eighty-eight-storey towers which, with their decorative spires, reach 1,480 feet (452m) in height, were also clad in stainless steel, following the Canary Wharf example.

Development History

No other part of London underwent a more rapid and radical development in the 1980s and 1990s than the Isle of Dogs, following the closure of the docks and the creation of the London Docklands Development Corporation (LDDC) in 1981. Conceived under the Thatcher Government, the project was intended to revitalize the Thames Docklands under the auspices of the LDDC, and Canary Wharf was set to be the largest commercial development in the world. The Government agreed to fund an elaborate infrastructure in 1987: roadways, rail links and mains services on a large scale, much as the French had done at La Defense. The Government also made Docklands a special Enterprise Zone, exempt from planning regulations but controlled by the Development Corporation.

The American firm Skidmore Owings & Merrill (Chicago) — SOM — were the masterplanners for the scheme, setting guidelines for the planning and architecture, a common North American strategy. They determined dimensions for the individual buildings, heights of cornice lines and the location of arcades. They also laid down that natural stone should be used for the bases of buildings, that reflective glass cladding should be prohibited, and that care should be taken with rooftops as they would be visible from neighbouring towers. Most of the selected architectural firms

128 Ibid., 714.

were North American and, like Pelli, experienced in designing commercial buildings and in supervising speedy construction.

The Canary Wharf development was a very controversial project facing many difficulties, both economic and aesthetic. The LDDC covered an area which included historic buildings and was subject to the national policy guidelines on conservation set out in the Department of the Environment circular 8/87. This gave the Greater London Council's Historic Buildings Division some powers to comment on proposals directly affecting listed buildings, but no locus to influence the height and scale of the new development. When two major banks — Credit Suisse First Boston and Morgan Stanley — were looking for prestige headquarter buildings, they turned away from the City where they were unsuccessful, and looked to Docklands. A proposal was put forward by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill and I. M. Pei to build three towers of 850 feet (259m) each. In 1986 a group of local authorities led by the Borough of Greenwich and the Greater London Council tried to get a judicial review of the scheme but failed. Tower Hamlets Borough Council was generally in favour of the plans and of the prospect of local jobs that they offered. Colin Amery in the *Financial Times* welcomed the towers and the Royal Fine Art Commission also accepted them, although with reservations about their positioning in relation to the view of the Royal Naval College on the south bank of the Thames at Greenwich.[129]

The original banking firms withdrew from the consortium in July 1987, believing the scheme to be more ambitious than they could afford. Canadian-based property developers Olympia and York, owned by the Reichman brothers, took over the scheme immediately. The company made only minor changes to the original scheme, but the tower blocks were repositioned and the two easternmost ones were reduced in height. Construction began in 1987, and the first tower was completed in 1991.The *Daily Telegraph* group moved in, but the development failed to attract many tenants, companies being unwilling to relocate from the City. By then, a world-wide property slump had set in, and Olympia and York went bankrupt in 1992. After much negotiation, which included a guarantee that the Jubilee line would be extended to Canary Wharf, a loan was granted in 1993, and work on the incomplete phase 2, and phases 3 to 5, planned by SOM and Koetter Kim & Associates, was resumed. By 1996, more than 24.6 million square feet (2.28 million sq m) of commercial development space and almost twenty thousand new homes were built over an area of 8.5 square miles (22 sq km). By March 1996 £6.3 billion had been invested by the private sector, and £1.7 billion by the LDDC.[130]

It is hoped that the completion of the Jubilee line extension will bring in more tenants and that the rest of the development will be completed according to the tightly planned axial development of formal spaces originally envisaged, and unique in the otherwise piecemeal development of Docklands. The Survey of London, in the second volume on Poplar, Blackwall and the Isle of Dogs, gave a detailed account of the Canary Wharf development, at the end of which it commented:

> 'Yet if Canary Wharf has not proved an immediate financial success, its physical embodiment is an impressive tribute to North American optimism and methods of

129 SOL 1994, 708.

130 *The Guiness Book of Records* (1997), 182.

construction'.[131]

CONTEMPORARY AND RECENT COMMENTS

The comments surrounding the development at the time of its construction were, on the whole, negative; opinions have generally softened since the late 1990s as commentators have adjusted to the architectural reality of the tower. Francis Tibbalds, writing in the *Architects' Journal* described the tower as a 'megalump';[132] Huw Thomas in *The Planner* commented that 'design opportunities were lost, the iron grip of patronage by developers squeezed the vitality out of the design as much as the crudest planning control'.[133]

The contrast between the new commercial buildings and the neglected older houses in the area struck some as frankly immoral. Janet Foster wrote: 'The Canary Wharf development, the beacon of the new Docklands still takes my breath away, perhaps because of its quality, but also because of the stark contrast with the deprivation surrounding it'.[134] The same author warned against a monofunctional urban zone, and the danger of the deadening effect of international corporate culture.

Architectural writer Joseph Rykwert echoed these sentiments in his book *The City in the 21st Century*:

> 'Expensively finished high-rise office buildings would now dwarf the more or less gated new housing to make an even sharper contrast with a blighted hinterland. After two decades, the district of Tower Hamlets, which contains Docklands, has remained as socially confused as La Defense. The view from the Greenwich Hospital is now of a stubby square across the river, the overwhelming Docklands tower a permanent reminder of the association of very high building with recession, and of the impotence of corporate capital to generate a socially cohesive environment'.[135]

But there has been much positive writing on the tower and the surrounding buildings. Colin Davies of the *Architects' Journal* commented in 1991, soon after the tower's completion, that:

> 'Ordinary Londoners seem to like Canary Wharf. For every one critical remark in the commentary book at the visitor's centre, there are at least 20 glowing endorsements. Even Cesar Pelli's 245 metre tower, for which a vehemently hostile public reaction was confidently predicted, charms everyone within a radius of 20 miles who catches a glimpse of its obelisk form lit up by the setting sun'.[136]

Davies continued:

> 'The other buildings in phase one are just plain ugly, with the exception of Pelli's tower which is rather beautiful. This is the tallest building in Europe, but doesn't

131 SOL 1994, 712.

132 *Architects Journal* (17 November 1990).

133 *The Planner* (20 March 1992), 8.

134 Foster 1999, 353.

135 Rykwert 2000, 227.

136 *Architects' Journal* (18 December 1991), 56.

look it, at least from close up. If anything it looks slightly squat and would be much improved as a pure form if it were 20 per cent taller. When viewed from a distance its real size becomes apparent and it takes on a sublime, slightly scary quality, like one of Boulee's architectural fantasies. Much of this effect is due to its splendid isolation. We read it as a monument, rather than a skyscraper because there are no other skyscrapers around. Unfortunately, if further phases of Canary Wharf go ahead, then it will become just the highest in a cluster of towers and lose its awful solemnity'.[137]

This last point was reiterated and expanded by journalist Robert Holden in the same issue of the *Architects' Journal*:

> 'Canary Wharf has given the skyline of London a new and significant landmark. Cesar Pelli's 244 m high tower is visible from miles around and as far away as Harlow. Unlike, say, the National Westminster tower, it is a positive addition: it sits well when viewed from Waterloo Bridge, it is a focus and landmark for Docklands, and while it does not harmonise with the view from Greenwich Park, it is hardly the lone modern interruption, as that view was irreparably damaged by all the 1960s high-rise flats that spread across the East End. There is, though, a danger that Canary Wharf will attract further skyscrapers, a danger that lies in London's lack of a skyline policy. The Department of the Environment's current 'selected view protection policy' does not deal with skylines, and so does not attempt to compose high-rise development in the way that happens in San Francisco. Indeed it tends to disperse such buildings as Foster's King's Cross where high rise design is pushed up to the north of the site to avoid a particular viewline. In San Francisco, however, it is the whole grouping of the buildings on the skyline which is considered and composed at the planning scale and is subject to aesthetic review by the city planners. If we are to have high rise office towers in London then care should be taken, at a strategic planning scale, as to where they go. London's skyline needs as much care as that of San Francisco, Paris or Amsterdam'.[138]

With the recent erection of two towers close to the original one, it would appear that Messrs Davies and Holden's fears of the dilution of the effect of a solitary tower are being confirmed. Mr Owen Whalley, Head of the Planning Department at Tower Hamlets, has said in conversation that the tower has become an icon for Docklands, and a standard by which future proposals for tall buildings in the vicinity will be measured. His planning team are currently working on Supplementary Planning Guidance for Tall Buildings in Tower Hamlets.[139]

The Survey of London monograph, *Docklands in the Making,* commented favourably:

> 'Canary Wharf Tower, although it has its critics, has generally been applauded and has quickly established itself as one of London's most instantly recognisable landmarks. Seen from a distance it dominates the skyline and looks every inch its height, and viewed from Blackfriars Bridge its vastness does make the Isle of Dogs seem very close to the City, as it was intended to'.[140]

137 Ibid., 62.

138 Ibid., 65.

139 Telephone conservation with Owen Whalley, 10 January 2002.

140 SOL 1995, 63.

The *Buildings of England* monograph on London Docklands, published in 1998, is even more enthusiastic, even lyrical, in the analysis of the tower at Canary Wharf:

> 'The masterstroke in the planning of Canary Wharf, obvious but nevertheless successful, was the building of a single skyscraper at the centre of the development to serve as a permanent advertisement for Docklands and an inescapable challenge to Canary Wharf's rival the City of London. Most Londoners have come to admire the tower as a landmark, its monolithic simplicity subtly changing with the light and weather as it emerges gleaming from the river fog, or at night, shows a dependable winking eye. Companion towers were planned and may yet be built — a new configuration may be more exciting or just banal — but the memory of Britain's first skyscraper, potent symbol of post-war north American financial and cultural dominance, will linger'.[141]

Paul Calvocoressi of English Heritage reviewed the monograph for the *London Topographical Society Newsletter* in March 1998. He expressed his personal view that the tower, its scale and materials, had had a devastating effect on the setting of the Queen's House and the Royal Naval College, and that this point had not been made strongly enough by the *Buildings of England* team.

The *Buildings of England* summarized its perception of the architectural impact on London of the Canary Wharf development with the observation:

> 'Canary Wharf introduced the British to the speed and efficiency of American fast-track construction on a huge scale, and to the size, eclecticism and luxury of North American Postmodern commercial architecture and landscape ... Olympia and York changed expectations not only in Docklands but also in the City of London. Pelli's tower stimulated competition from the City of London, leading to Sir Norman Foster's proposal for a 328m rival tower in 1996'.[142]

The last sentence here refers to Sir Norman Foster's controversial proposal to build the Millennium Tower on the site of the former Baltic Exchange in the heart of the City. Had it been completed, this building would have risen to some 1,300 feet (400m), well over twice the height of Tower 42. However, there was an outcry from conservationists, including many of the amenity societies, the former Royal Fine Art Commission, and English Heritage, each one objecting to the height, scale and bulk of the tower, not to mention its damaging effect on the setting of St Paul's and the skyline of the City of London as a whole. The application was eventually withdrawn, but a subsequent proposal for a shorter tower on the same site won the necessary approvals. Designed by the same architects, the Swiss Re Tower is currently under construction.

This brings the discussion back full circle to the relevance and role of English Heritage in advising and commenting on tall buildings. In recent years there has been a resurgence in the number of tall buildings proposals in Britain's major cities including Birmingham, Manchester and Newcastle. In London, proposals have been put forward for the City and the West End, including the Swiss Re and Heron Bishopsgate Tower. Other proposals have appeared in the central fringe areas such as Paddington and London Bridge, and suburban town centres (Clapham Junction) and on major arterial routes, (the 'Pinnacle', Chiswick). Champions and critics of

141 Williamson and Pevsner 1998, 114.

142 Ibid., 62.

tall buildings have been arguing their cases in the press and at the recent Heron Bishopsgate public inquiry. There is clearly a need, as there was in 1991when Robert Holden made his plea in the *Architects' Journal*, for a coherent strategic policy by which to assess such applications to build tall towers. English Heritage is keen to influence Government policy on high buildings, as stated recently in the English Heritage *Conservation Bulletin*, 'In particular, we wish to ensure that significant city skylines and historic environments are fully acknowledged and protected from potential harmful impacts from tall buildings'.[143]

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143 Byrne 2001, 34.

Fig. 10 Canary Wharf Tower (One Canada Square), Canary Wharf, London, E14, by Cesar Pelli & Associates, with Adamson Associates and Frederick Gibberd Coombes & Partners, 1988–91.

PART THREE

TALL BUILDINGS OUTSIDE LONDON

10
CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETY OFFICES MANCHESTER

COORDINATES

Address:	*Co-operative Society Offices, Miller Street, Manchester*
Date:	*1959–62*
Architects:	*G. S. Hay of CWS and Gordon Tait of Sir John Burnet, Tait & Partners*
Contractors:	*John Laing & Son Ltd*
Client:	*Co-operative Insurance Society*
Height:	*CIS Tower: 400 feet (122m)*

HISTORY

In January 1953, the Co-operative Insurance Society began to consider the possibility of building new headquarters in Manchester. At that time, the Society's staff were scattered across the city in ten different buildings, and there was an urgent need to establish a first-class, centralized working environment. Furthermore, CIS management wanted a building that reflected the status of the rapidly-growing insurance company and would add to the prestige of the Co-operative movement in general. The new building was also intended to improve the appearance of the city of Manchester, in which the CIS was one of the largest financial organizations.[1] Two sites were offered by Manchester's planning authorities; one in Piccadilly, and another at the intersection of Miller Street and Corporation Street. Due to certain planning limitations on the Piccadilly site — any development was obliged to include shops and a hotel — the CIS board decided upon the latter.[2] The first design submitted, by company architect G. S. Hay, FRIBA, was for an office building seventeen storeys in height. According to *The Builder*, tall buildings were not in favour at this time, and planning permission was refused.[3]

Not easily put off, the CIS went back to the drawing board, and began to approach architects, in the attempt to find one with experience of designing tall buildings who could work in association with Hay. After visits to see comparable offices in London, Gordon Tait, of Burnet, Tait and Partners, was appointed.[4] New plans were jointly drawn up for a fourteen-storey building, which duly received planning permission. However, before anything went ahead, CIS management felt that it was advisable to study some examples of large office buildings in the United States and Canada. This visit, clearly influential, resulted in the design of the present curtain-

1 'CIS Offices, Manchester', *Architect & Building News* (16 January 1963), 85.

2 'CIS Building, Manchester', *The Builder* (8 March 1963), 490.

3 Ibid., 490.

4 Gordon Tait had won the widely published 1955 competition for the Gaiety Theatre site in London, but in 1956 the competition was overturned in favour of a somewhat dull scheme by Charles Holden. Tait was thus given priority in the case of the Co-operative Society offices.

walled group of buildings, focussed on a twenty-five storey tower. On this occasion — the architectural climate having changed — planning permission was granted, and it has been suggested that the city's planning authorities would have preferred something even higher.[5]

Work began on site in August 1959, with John Laing & Son Ltd as the main contractors, and was completed in October 1962. At a very early stage in construction, the Design Research Unit (chiefly Misha Black and Alexander Gibson) was called in to design the interiors of the building, in conjunction with the architects, contractors and client. To ensure this collaboration worked smoothly, and integrated with the other phases of construction, fortnightly meetings were held for assistants, and monthly meetings for principals.[6] The DRU's brief was to advise on interior planning, furnishing and decoration and, in consultation with the engineers, to advise on the visual side of the mechanical equipment in so far as it affected appearance and function. In order to carry out this brief effectively, two representative departments and a typical executive office were studied. The furniture designed by the DRU, which included a standard desk and an executive desk, was made in Co-operative Wholesale Society (CWS) factories.[7] Attention was given in particular to 'special' areas including the entrance hall, cafeteria, recreation room and the two executive floors (the twenty-third and twenty-fourth levels). This was at the direction of the CIS general manager, who stated that 'in Sweden it is understood that when a new building is built a certain proportion of the total cost will be set aside to be spent on artistic features. No such understanding exists in Great Britain, but nevertheless my board recognized that apart from the general décor of the building there were certain areas which required special treatment'.[8]

The Co-operative Society offices were opened by the Duke of Edinburgh on 22 October, 1962. The main feature of the group was the tower housing the CIS's 2,500 staff (known as the CIS Tower). This is T-shaped in plan, the spine being formed of a windowless service tower housing lifts, lavatories, air conditioning and plumbing ducts. This concrete service shaft, which rises a storey higher than the main office, provides stiffening against the wind, and is clad in mosaic, a material chosen after a visit to Milan. The mosaic was intended to 'sparkle in the sunlight',[9] and to resist the pollution of the Manchester air.[10] The main block of the tower has a steel frame and uninterrupted glass curtain walling, with black vitreous enamel panels marking the floor levels. A five-storey podium, built over an existing air raid shelter, contained the offices of the larger departments, and the Society's computer. On completion, the tower — which rises to 400 feet (122m) — was claimed to be one of the highest buildings in the United Kingdom.

The interior of the CIS Tower was, as we have seen, designed by the DRU. Escalators led from the entrance hall to the podium block, whilst the main floors were reached via eight lifts, which travelled at 800 feet (244m) per minute. The entrance hall itself has a granite floor, walls of Sicilian marble, a ceiling of

5 *Interior Design* (Jan/Feb 1963), 3.

6 Ibid., 3.

7 Ibid., 3.

8 Ibid., 4.

9 *Architect & Building News* (1963), 85.

10 *Interior Design* (1963), 3.

preformed white glass fibre, and is dominated by an abstract mural of bronzed fibreglass by William Mitchell. The two upper floors, housing the managerial suite and senior staff dining rooms, were equally lavish, even containing works by contemporary artists including Lowry. At the very top, was a viewing room, which 'gives as wide a panorama as the Manchester atmosphere will allow'.[11] The main offices were open and unobstructed, partitioning having been used as little as possible. Further facilities included a fifth-floor recreation hall with sprung dance floor, cinema screen and murals by Barry Daniels, and basement lounge and cafeteria, with murals by Vicenzo Apicella. The tower was one of the first two installations in Europe — the other being the Bayer AG at Leverkusen in Germany — of integrated lighting and air-conditioning systems.[12]

Forming a group with the CIS tower are a rectangular, double-height single-storey conference hall, and a fourteen-storey office block, rented to the CWS and known as New Century House. The same architects — Hay and Tait — were responsible for these buildings. The interior of the conference hall, designed to seat 1,000 people, is by Jonathan Green Associates, and features sculptured panels by Stephen Sykes. Though designed as a conference hall for shareholders' meetings, the building's potential was realized soon after its completion, and it was marketed as a venue for concerts, dances, exhibitions and other public functions. The hall is connected to the CWS offices, and shares the same entrance.

New Century House is similar in design to the CIS Tower, though on a much lower scale. In *Interbuild* in 1960, it was stated that the two buildings were joined by a tunnel, 50 feet (15m) below ground, but it is not known whether or not this was executed.[13] New Century House is approached via an entrance forecourt from Corporation Street, which has an abstract stone relief by John McCarthy on the left screen wall.

Contemporary Comment

Very soon after its completion, the CIS Tower was hailed by Henry Russell Hitchcock as Britain's 'finest skyscraper to date'.[14] Its effect on the Manchester skyline — which despite the building's setting on low-lying land near the river Irwell, was significant — was much praised. N. Keith Scott, a chartered architect and planning consultant, wrote in the *Architect & Building News* that 'it is, perhaps, the profile of the CIS building which is the most successful aspect of a work which must stand overall as a considerable triumph for British architecture'.[15] The main block and service tower were seen to be well linked together, and Scott was especially pleased with the lettering at the top of the service shaft, 'whose pale blue-green colour shines out over the night sky'.[16] The exterior of the tower 'relies solely on the excellence of its proportions for its effect' and its fenestration is happily

11 Ibid., 3.

12 *Architectural Design* (May 1963), 245.

13 *Interbuild* (September 1960), 9.

14 *Architect & Building News* (1963), 83.

15 Ibid., 83.

16 Ibid., 83.

'uncluttered'.[17] Writing of the interior, Scott describes the entrance hall as 'one of the best I have ever seen' and finds the mural by William Mitchell 'worth its weight in gold'.[18] The executive floors 'are an object lesson in how to get a feeling of distinction and opulence with utter simplicity', and of the interiors in general Scott writes that 'one would be hard pressed to name another building in the country of a superior quality of interior design'.[19]

However, there are also criticisms. Scott finds the entrance to the building 'most disappointing' and feels that the forecourt fails to exploit the possibilities of the site. There is a 'podgy little canopy tacked unfeelingly to the base of the curtain wall', which is 'crudely detailed and quite useless as a protection from rain and snow to the pavement over 20 feet [6.1m] below'.[20] This entrance was later criticised by Nikolaus Pevsner, who described it as the building's 'only weakness'.[21] More significantly, Scott feels that the group of three buildings does not work well together, the conference hall being insignificant and not sufficiently distinguished in design; 'it sits there like a tiny idiot owl between two colossal tree trunks'.[22] This view was not shared by Pevsner, who wrote in 1969 that 'the group of three succeeds in being a group ... [which] is more than one can say of the Piccadilly group of three which ... seems to be done by three different people not in sympathy with each other'.[23] Scott's summing up, however, does away with any minor doubts:

> 'It would not be difficult to erect a building of moment in Manchester whose post-war effort has produced tragically few good buildings. What is so very heartening is, that before the English curtain wall follows its American counterpart into the history of the mid-century, the city has acquired an example of outstanding quality, and (much more important) a precedent has been set by big business to give our major northern city the best design and quality available'.[24]

Recent and Current Comment

Clare Hartwell, in her recent revision and expansion of Pevsner's Manchester description, reiterates her predecessor's views on the Co-operative Society buildings. The CIS Tower is termed 'the best of the Manchester 1960s office blocks, done with discipline and consistency', and is seen to owe much to the architecture of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, especially the Inland Steel Building in Chicago.[25] The aims mentioned at the beginning of this review — namely, to add to the prestige of the Society, to improve the appearance of the city, and to provide first-class accommodation for staff — are still, nearly forty years on, seen as being

17 Ibid., 83.

18 Ibid., 84.

19 Ibid., 84.

20 Ibid., 83–84.

21 Pevsner 1969, 294.

22 *Architect & Building News* (1963), 83.

23 Pevsner 1969, 271.

24 *Architect & Building News* (1963), 84.

25 Hartwell 2001, 240.

fulfilled.[26]

The CIS Tower is still the tallest building in Manchester — indeed, it has been termed the tallest building outside London — and is widely viewed as the most distinguished office block within the city. It remains, as it had been described in 1963, 'an example of skyscraper design at its very best'.[27] In some ways, this is to be expected. The amount of time and preparation which went into the building's design — even including trips to America and Italy is exceptional, as is the thorough way in which its construction was managed. Someone, presumably the CIS's general manager, even went so far as to appoint at planning stage a premises controller, an engineer responsible for the running of the building. Money was clearly no object, which must have helped, but the design and construction of the CIS Tower seems to illustrate the right approach to a building of this type. Comfort, suitability, appropriateness, ease of use and the best in contemporary design were all considered essential, and the relationships between the various figures concerned — the architects, design consultants, clients, and planning authorities — seems to have been remarkably sound.

In recognition of their success, the group of three Society buildings were listed at grade II in 1995. The CIS Tower opened its doors to the public as part of Heritage Open Days in 2001.

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- *Architectural Design* (May 1963), 245–50.

26 Ibid., 241.

27 *Interior Design* (1963), 4.

Fig. 11 Co-operative Society Offices, Miller Street, Manchester, by G. S. Hay of CWS and Gordon Tait of Sir John Burnet, 1959–62.

11
PICCADILLY PLAZA MANCHESTER

COORDINATES

Address:	*Piccadilly Gardens, Manchester*
Date:	*1959–65*
Architects:	*Covell, Matthews & Partners*
Contractors:	*Bernard Sunley & Sons Ltd*
Client:	*Piccadilly Manchester Properties Ltd*
Height:	*Sunley House: 350 feet (107m); Hotel: 160 feet (49m)*

HISTORY

Plans and models of the development known as Piccadilly Plaza first appeared in 1959. The 2.5 acre (1ha) site, overlooking Piccadilly Gardens and bounded by York Street, Portland Street, Parker Street and Mosley Street, had been largely occupied by nineteenth-century warehouses, but these were all but obliterated during the Second World War. The old basements of these buildings had been filled with rubbish and refuse up to street level, and there was a strong call for redevelopment. The new scheme, designed by architects Covell, Matthews & Partners, was controlled by commercial considerations. Shops were to occupy both levels of a two-storey podium, with an internal piazza at first floor level. Above this would be placed two office blocks and a hotel. Reinforced concrete was chosen over steel framing, due to its comparative cheapness. The window wall form of cladding was also chosen for its cost effectiveness, whilst it offered the benefit of imposing minimal weight on the structure.[28] The scheme provided quite a challenge to the architects, who were set the task of providing overall unity to a mixed group of buildings.

Work began in November 1959 with the excavation of the entire site, a major undertaking. Special problems were provided by the proposed height of one of the office blocks — around 350 feet (107m) — which meant that contractors had to dig down to 50 feet (15m) below ground level. As construction proceeded, working conditions became incredibly difficult; after reaching 150 feet (46m), wind speeds of over 30 miles (44km) per hour meant that crane drivers had little control over their loads. The severe winter of 1962–63 brought temperatures of well below freezing.[29] Scaffolding was reduced to a minimum, the glazed curtain walling of the main tower block being placed into position from suspended cradles climbing as work progressed. Concreting continued all the time. The laying of an immense slab of reinforced concrete at the third floor of the lower office block (Bernard House), intended to support the remainder of the building, was particularly challenging. Some 700 cubic yards (535 cu m) of concrete was used, and the pour took nearly

28 *Architect & Building News* (17 November 1965), 914.

29 *The Builder* (23 April 1965), 897.

forty hours.[30]

On completion, the Piccadilly Plaza development was one of the largest in Great Britain to be executed since the war.[31] It was also one of the most complex. There was basement car parking for 250 vehicles, a public house, a petrol station, and a ground floor 'shopping ambulatory'.[32] At second floor level, there was an elevated 'open space' reached via escalators, with shops facing onto ornamental pools and carefully laid out gardens. Out of this level rose the three main vertical elements of the design; a 264-bedroom hotel (Hotel Piccadilly) overhanging Portland Street, opened in March 1965 by the Rt. Hon. Lord Shawcross, and two office blocks, one of seven storeys (Bernard House) and the other of twenty-four (Sunley House). The hotel was rented by Ind Coope from the developers, and Coope's architects worked in conjunction with Covell, Matthews & Partners on its interior design.[33] The lowest four decks, designated public areas, were topped by a superstructure of bedrooms and private suites, the latter located high up to minimize traffic noise and provide panoramic views over Manchester.[34] The third floor housed a banqueting hall for 600, a grill room seating sixty, a champagne bar and a long split-level restaurant seating 160, with windows overlooking Piccadilly Gardens. Also on the third floor was the King Cotton bar, with a decorative scheme based on the story of cotton and its links with Lancashire. On the fourth floor was King Arthur's Court, a suite of three inter-connected rooms and garden terraces intended for dinners and cocktail parties.[35] The office block termed Bernard House, set diagonally at the corner of Mosley Street, was of an unusual design, with a timber hyperbolic paraboloid roof. Sunley House, the tallest element of the development with twenty-four storeys plus three plant floors, was placed at right-angles to Piccadilly, its end wall decorated with relief designs derived from circuit boards. Segregation between pedestrians and traffic was considered essential; the second floor of the podium served as 'street level' for entrance to the hotel and office blocks. There was parking for 250 cars, with spiral ramps leading to York Street and down to the basement area. The complex, which cost around £10 million, was originally intended to form part of a larger development which would stretch down to Oxford Road and would include fifty to sixty office blocks, an arts and an entertainment centre.[36]

Contemporary Comment

Initially, the design and plan of Piccadilly Plaza was considered positively. The City Council was certainly keen to see some kind of development on a site which had become something of an embarrassment. Ian Nairn, in a 1960 review of proposed schemes in Birmingham, Liverpool and Manchester, found Piccadilly Plaza to be 'the only one of the big commercial super block schemes in the three cities to hold out some hopes of being a good building — good in its architectural details and

30 Ibid., 899.

31 Ibid., 897.

32 *Architect & Building News* (29 April 1959), 549.

33 *Architects' Journal* (24 March 1965), 686.

34 *Architect & Building News* (1965), 915.

35 Ibid., 915.

36 Atkins 1976, 19.

good to walk around, in a fuzzily humanistic sense which is just as important'.[37] However, models can be deceptive, for once completed, praise was less forthcoming. In his 1969 guide to Manchester, Dennis Sharp described Piccadilly Plaza as 'by no means visually coherent' and added that 'the self-conscious roof to the smaller office block is an inappropriate reminder of one of the design fads of the late fifties'.[38] This lack of visual unity was a criticism repeated by a number of writers, including Nikolaus Pevsner, who found that the three buildings — 'more exciting than architecturally valuable' — seemed in spite of a common architect and podium 'to be done by three different people not in sympathy with each other'.[39] Again repeating the point, Pevsner wrote: 'One can see what was in the minds of the architects: only it has not come off, and the group, instead of reading together, looks desperately disparate'.[40] In 1976, Philip Atkins made the by then common observation (that the three buildings 'seem poorly related to one another') but also raised further points. Atkins wrote that 'more seriously', the buildings were 'quite unrelated to the scale of the other buildings round about'.[41] He described how the first floor shopping piazza had been unpopular from the beginning, due to the down-draughts from Sunley House. By 1967, only eleven of the forty available shops had been let. A yellow fibreglass and perspex umbrella roof was fitted, but this failed to make any real difference, and Atkins found the piazza 'still a rather eerie and deserted place'.[42] The ground-floor shops were much better frequented, 'though the arcades through are dark and draughty and only lead to York Street, self-evidently the back of the Plaza'.[43]

Recent and Contemporary Comment

Comment continued in much the same vein into the 1990s, and in more recent years. Clare Hartwell, in her revised guide to Manchester, repeats Pevsner's descriptions almost word for word, adding that the Plaza 'completely fails to take any account of its surroundings'. Still, she found that 'the sheer confidence and scale impress'.[44] Eamonn Canniffe and Tom Jefferies describe the development as 'Manchester's architectural equivalent of Concorde',[45] and the Plaza has been termed a 'blight' by John Parkinson Bailey.[46] Bailey writes that 'whether or not any or all of the buildings have any architectural merit, their placement took no account of the grain of the area, and the whole block forms a barrier across the city in a way that no other set of buildings do — it sits across the ends of Faulker, George and Back George Streets and entirely cuts off that sector of the city from Piccadilly'.[47]

37 Nairn 1960, 115.

38 Sharp 1969, 36.

39 Pevsner 1969, 271, 296.

40 Ibid., 296.

41 Atkins 1976, 19.

42 Ibid., 20.

43 Ibid., 20.

44 Hartwell 2001, 190.

45 Canniffe and Jefferies 1998, no. 10.

46 Parkinson-Bailey 2000, 185.

47 Ibid., 184–85.

Bailey concludes that Piccadilly Plaza 'has never been loved by the public at large'.[48] This was reflected by the status of the building over the final years of the 1990s; large proportions of the Plaza's floorspace had become vacant and the structure was deteriorating. A study found that the podium was 'the most negative feature in urban design terms, inhibiting movement and presenting an unattractive, oppressive appearance at street level'.[49]

Still, the complex has become one of Manchester's major landmarks, the height of Sunley House being exceeded only by the grade II listed CIS Tower. Despite its present run down appearance, demolition has never been spoken of as a real possibility. This is partly due to the long leases held by occupiers such as NCP, the Government Office for the North West, and the Jarvis Hotel Group. However, it may also be a reflection of the way in which the complex has come to be viewed. There has even been some call for the listing of the Plaza — the Manchester Civic Society, for example, has supported this idea — but when it was considered, the case was rejected.[50] In a plea for the survival of the complex, the architect Roger Stephenson has made the point that 'it is the ultimate act of urban regeneration to take a tired old Victorian warehouse with dry rot, rising damp, dodgy foundations and a leaking roof, and nurture it back into a new life, all for a cost not dissimilar to that of a new building. And yet our society gladly sanctions the demolition of 20-year-old structures for symbolic reasons, with not a thought to the possibility of reworking them or, indeed, the enormous waste of energy and materials caused by such destruction'.[51]

The Plaza continues to occupy a prime office and retail location, and was bought in 1998 for £22 million by London-based Portfolio Holdings, in what has been described as 'the most significant property transaction in the city in the last five years'.[52] In 1999, Manchester City Council considered favourably a planning application for the comprehensive refurbishment of the Plaza, and work has now begun, to the designs of Leslie Jones Architects.[53] The refurbishment programme will involve the creation of a new two-storey shopping arcade and link between York and Parker Streets, the opening up of the podium by means of arcades at ground floor level, the improvement of facilities and the external refurbishment of the Jarvis Piccadilly Hotel, and the recladding and complete internal overhaul of Sunley House (to be renamed 'City Tower'). The new cladding will be of green tinted solar reflective glass which, when combined with floodlighting, is hoped to transform the building into an attractive city landmark. Most dramatically, the ailing and largely unoccupied Bernard House is to be demolished (indeed, was demolished in 2000) to make way for new retailing space. The new complex will comprise over 333,700 square feet (31,000 sq m) of office space, 182,000 square feet (17,000 sq m) of retailing and a 205,000 square feet (19,000 sq m) hotel, and will be renamed

48 Ibid., 185.

49 Ibid., 269.

50 Information from the website of Allott & Lomax, who have been appointed as structural engineers for the redevelopment of Piccadilly Plaza. See: http://www.allott.co.uk/N_/News/Nwinter_9.htm.

51 Parkinson-Bailey 2000, 270.

52 Ibid., 269.

53 This and the following information taken from the website of Manchester City Council: http://www.manchesterupdate.org.uk/article18.htm.

Piccadilly Exchange. The surrounding streetscape is also to be reworked as part of a wider regeneration of the area, as is Piccadilly Gardens itself, the latter by EDAW, Ove Arup and Tadao Ando. Such improvements are to be paid for by the erection of a new office building on the Portland Street side of the Gardens. The whole will thus be transformed into — as the Council puts it — 'one of the most exciting public spaces in Europe and an attractive and dynamic gateway to the Regional Centre'. The £60 million refurbishment of Piccadilly Plaza is expected to be completed in time for the 2002 Commonwealth Games.

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Fig. 12 Piccadilly Plaza, Piccadilly Gardens, Manchester, by Covell, Matthews & Partners, 1959–65.

12
FORMER ROBINSON BUILDING BRISTOL

COORDINATES

Address:	*Former Robinson Building, 1 Redcliff Street, Bristol*
Date:	*1961–64*
Architect:	*John Collins*
Contractors:	*Sir Robert McAlpine & Sons Ltd*
Client:	*E. S. and A. Robinson (Holdings) Ltd*
Height:	*200 feet (61m)*

HISTORY

The 1.5 acre (0.6ha) city centre site in Bristol now housing the Robinson Building had been occupied since 1846 by Robinson's, a highly successful paper-making and packaging organization. A large office building was designed for the company by W. S. Gringell and built in 1876. This, however, was seriously damaged in the Second World War and, some time around 1960, the company decided to build new offices, more suitable for their purposes. Robinson's asked their own group architects — headed by John E. Collins, who had joined the company in 1946 — to produce a design for a new headquarters. The building was to be capable of housing about a thousand people and was to include adequate car parking, dining and conference facilities for its owners. It was to be simple in form and economic in capital cost and maintenance.[54]

The site, the prominent corner of Redcliff Street and Victoria Street, opposite the Bristol Bridge, presented some challenges. It was just outside of the normal office area, which suggested the viability of a combination of office space with warehouses and shops. Eventually, the company decided on owner-occupied offices only. Within close proximity of the site were the mainly eighteenth-century church of St Thomas (grade II*) and churchyard, and four seventeenth-century houses (grade II*, now shops and offices). Opposite, on the north-east side of Victoria Street, was a group of commercial buildings (*c.* 1875; grade II), whilst further down the street was the Temple or Holy Cross Church (*c.* 1400, gutted *c.* 1940; grade II*). After 'investigations', which remain unclear and seem to have failed to address the sensitivities of these historic structures, the architect and client decided to opt for a tower block, with teaching and conference facilities to be housed in a low, adjacent building. This decision, though unexceptional for the time, must have seemed radical to Bristolians. The city's skyline, until the erection of the Robinson Building, was made up wholly of medieval, Georgian and Victorian architecture, with only a few really high landmarks; most significantly, the Cabot Tower (1897–98) and the University Tower (1925). The city's church spires — such as that of St Mary Redcliffe, which stands at 293 feet (89m) — still dominated.

54 *Architect & Building News* (2 December 1964), 1067.

Work began on site in July 1961 and was completed in August 1963. Materials and methods of construction were carefully planned. A mock-up building was even raised on site in 1962, a test often used in America, which in this case resulted in the adoption of a white Carrara marble aggregate finish. A small room was created inside the mock-up, in which interior treatments could be tried out.[55] The finished building, which has a reinforced concrete frame, rises through fifteen storeys, and housed one department per 10,000 square feet (929 sq m) of floor space. At ground-floor level, perimeter columns, or structural mullions, are alternately two storey and single storey in height, whilst above this level all are two storey. The cladding is of precast concrete panels, finished in Carrara marble chip. The panels above the windows have curved lower edges, producing the effect of segmental-headed arches. This strongly expressed, repetitive single-window motif may have been inspired by the former Robinson office, which has been described as 'visually ... nothing but superimposed arcades'.[56] The building's external design has also been viewed as a response to the tower's squat proportions, and more recently as a modern assertion of the style commonly known as the Bristol Byzantine.[57]

The interior of the office is open-plan, set around a 50 feet (15m) square central service core, the walls of which were designed to resist wind forces and to carry nearly half the dead load of the building. The ground floor of the tower was taken up by the entrance and reception area, and parking for one hundred cars. The basement beneath housed a plant room and executive car park. A typical office floor was open, arranged around the service core, but the executive floors could be subdivided in places. The upper three levels were designed for directors' offices, and kitchen and restaurant facilities, with a three-bedroom flat for the caretaker at roof level.

The large expanses of glass provided unobstructed views of the historic buildings surrounding the site, something which the *Architects' Journal* found 'most stimulating'.[58] The self-contained, single-storey conference hall is raised above the ground on eight pillars, and linked to the tower by a bridge at mezzanine level. It contained a large lecture room capable of seating two hundred, which could be converted into smaller spaces. Inside both buildings, colour was kept to a minimum, to 'avoid clashing with packaging samples handled by the clients' staff'.[59] Certain functional features were marked out, however; for example, the lift shafts were orange. Furniture and fittings were chosen by the architects together with a senior director of the Robinson Group. The best in 'original' contemporary design was chosen, including Mies van der Rohe Barcelona chairs and Saarinen desk chairs. Smaller details such as ash trays and tableware were also carefully selected. The building was, for its time, considered luxurious, and came complete with air-conditioning and lifts which travelled at 500 feet (152m) per minute. The final cost was just over £1,600,000.

55 *The Builder* (16 March 1962), 566.

56 Gomme, Jenner and Little 1979, 337; for an elevation drawing of the original Robinson headquarters, see 336.

57 English Heritage internal report by Elain Harwood , HA&RT Out County file: OUT 110.

58 *Architects' Journal* (30 December 1964), 1556.

59 *Architect & Building News* (1964), 1072.

CONTEMPORARY AND RECENT COMMENT

There were mixed reactions to the scale and design of the Robinson Building, Bristol's first tower block. One critic described it as 'incredibly ugly' and there was a strong feeling that it should not have been permitted on a central site.[60] T. H. B. Burrough noted in 1970 that 'this building opened the flood gates and there is now no stopping the rush of tall buildings that has changed the character of the city. Until 1964 the towers and spires of the city churches dominated, but these are now lost against the bulk of the office towers'.[61] In 1972, *Building Design* reported a contemporary protest. Apparently, students from Bristol University — though not from the architecture department — marched through the city with a cardboard model of the Robinson Building, which they burnt in effigy. The ashes were presented to, and long held by, the company, which later became Dickinson Robinson.[62] In 1979, Gomme, Jenner and Little — in their *Bristol: An Architectural History* — found that the building lacked individuality, and did not even reflect its Bristol context. The tower 'seems only to wear a Bristolian air when seen across a foreground of ropes, boats and cranes'.[63] Little also noted 'the difficulty of combining a distinctively modern style with a vernacular touch'.[64]

Thus, the Robinson Building was seen by many as failing to respond to its environment. Photographs taken soon after its completion show it standing out strikingly against a historic skyline, despite its location in the lowest part of the city. The *Architects' Journal* reported that, from distant views, it compared 'unfavourably with the more generous proportions of older buildings in the neighbourhood'.[65] In 1963, Reece Winstone wrote that 'the Bristol Bridge, and a mile around, is now dominated by our first 15 storey office block'.[66] When, in the later 1960s, there were plans to erect a 300 feet (91m)tall telephone exchange behind King Street, and to build tower blocks in Quay Street, 'blighting' St John's-on-the-Wall, protest was strong. Reece Winstone wrote to the *Evening Post* that the 'city planners must ban all such towers from the central area to preserve our heritage of a medieval city. Keep them on the line of the Outer Circuit Road, in Easton, St Philip's Marsh, or Totterdown, two miles from the city centre, if commerce requires them'.[67]

One feature of the design of the Robinson Building which has been viewed with particular criticism is its physical relationship to the neighbouring Church of St Thomas and the seventeenth-century nos. 25-31 Victoria Street. It was intended to link these historic structures with the newly built offices by creating an open space for pedestrians. However, the link was seen by the *Architects' Journal* to be 'not at all resolved'. The writer felt that the open space was 'likely to remain deserted until a more obvious means of access is provided between the terrace and the public

60 Winstone 1963, no. 30.

61 Burrough 1970, no. 154.

62 *Building Design* (10 November 1972), 6.

63 Gomme, Jenner And Little 1979, 426.

64 Ibid.

65 *Architects' Journal* (1964), 1562.

66 Winstone 1963, no. 30.

67 Winstone 1990, 27 May 1968.

thoroughfare'.[68]

Nevertheless, the Robinson Building has also received praise. Sir Basil Spence commended its design in May 1961 and referred to it as 'a gift to the City',[69] whilst the *Architects' Journal* felt that 'the overall consistent standard of detail in the Robinson building reflects an architectural maturity which could form the basis for future development'.[70] The exterior of the tower has been described as 'fussy' and as 'lacking in structural expression', but also as 'elegant', 'neat', 'precisely designed', and as having 'a monumental quality enhanced by its consistency and simplicity of detail'.[71] The architect, John Collins, was clearly pleased with it. In 1972, a writer for *Building Design* visited his Leigh Woods home and saw an Impressionist style painting of the Robinson Building displayed on the wall, coupled with an image of the original company offices.[72]

Today, the Robinson Building is considered to be one of Bristol's landmarks. Nonetheless, this perhaps owes more to its site — a central position on the south side of Bristol's oldest river crossing — than it does to its design. Ian Collinson of Bristol City Council has stated that were the same design to be submitted today, it would almost certainly (and unsurprisingly) be refused permission. At the very least, were it to be considered, a full scoping assessment of the city and its skyline would need to be carried out. Undoubtedly, times and attitudes have changed. Permission has recently been granted for the erection of an office building on the car park to the rear of the Robinson Building, but this is only to rise to seven or eight storeys in height.

The Robinson Building was considered for listing in 1995, soon after the offices were vacated by the Dickinson Robinson group. The building was then being refurbished, and the City Council had received a planning application for the erection of a large wavy canopy around the ground floor. Elain Harwood was reasonably positive about the building's merits — it was, she wrote, 'the first tall building to be designed as an open-plan office' — but it was rejected for listing by English Heritage's Post War Steering Group.[73] It is not known what, if any, alterations have been carried out to the building since this time.

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71 *Architects' Journal* (1964), 1562; *Interbuild* (November 1964), 24; Burrough 1970, no. 154.

72 *Building Design* (1972), 6.

73 English Heritage internal report, HA&RT Out County file: OUT 110.

Fig. 13 Former Robinson Building, Redcliff Street, Bristol, by John Collins, 1961–63.

13
THE BULL RING CENTRE BIRMINGHAM

COORDINATES

Address:	*New Street*
Date:	*1961–64*
Architect:	*First scheme devised by James A. Roberts (1958); final scheme developed by Sydney Greenwood and T. J. Hirst*

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Birmingham city centre changed more drastically in the years after the war than it had since the turn of the century. Redevelopment plans in Birmingham had begun well before the end of the war with the establishment, in 1941, of four advisory planning panels. This was at the behest of the City Engineer and Surveyor, Herbert Manzoni, whose principal objective was to create a modern city to provide a better living and working environment for Birmingham's citizens, with segregation of cars and pedestrians, and zoning of housing, industry and commerce. Manzoni and the Birmingham city architect, A.G. Sheppard-Fidler, devised a new set of inner city ring roads and open spaces in the city centre, a pioneering approach in Britain. Pugin's Bishop's House and the old Bull Ring market area were casualties of this clearance. The road network was largely financed by the sale or leasing of sites to development companies who built speculative offices and shops. Birmingham's redevelopment continued apace from these beginnings. The ring road was begun in 1957, and was shortly followed by a shopping and commercial development, the Ringway Centre at Smallbrook Queensway, designed by a Birmingham architect James A. Roberts. This development of 1960 was seen as a landmark in attempting an architecture for a brave new world in post-war Britain, and was clearly influenced by the vision and architectural possibilities put forward by the Constructivists of the 1920s, and by American curtain walling.

At the beginning of the 1970s, property continued to prove a secure from of investment, particularly in the commercial sphere. This was demonstrated notoriously at the Centre Point office block in London (built 1961–66), which remained unoccupied for several years but continued to increase in value because of the inflation in the value of the land on which it was built. This economic situation, combined with a compelling need to regenerate the semi-derelict inner city areas, ensured that development continued at a rapid pace in Birmingham. The principal architects involved were John Madin, James Roberts, John Surman and Graham Winteringham.

ACCOUNT

The old Bull Ring had been the centre of town on a sloping site from Digbeth to the High Street and contained the market place. Birmingham architect James Roberts, with his experience of developing a linear shopping parade at Smallbrook

Queensway in 1959, had early input into the design of the Bull Ring shopping centre, but the final design was prepared in 1960 by Sydney Greenwood and T. James Hirst. Hirst was architect to the Laing Development Company Limited, who built the complex at a cost of £8 million, between 1961 and 1964.

The Bull Ring development was conceived in 1960 as a large pedestrianized shopping centre on a three-acre (1.2ha) site. When completed, it comprised a fully enclosed, air conditioned shopping complex with department stores, market halls and supermarkets. There were individual shop units on two levels, a multi-storey car park, a nine-storey office block and a bus terminal reached from points of access from surrounding streets, on different levels. The Bull Ring was bisected by two wide carriageways and linked by new buildings and pedestrian subways. Pedestrian and fast moving traffic were separated, but shops, market halls, offices, car parks and public transport were well integrated. These qualities were admired by Pevsner and Wedgwood when Birmingham was visited in the mid-1960s to assess the city for the *Buildings of England* series. They wrote: 'The technical problems have been solved efficiently, even excitingly, but much of the architecture is disappointing'.[74]

The partial success of the Bull Ring until its recent demolition was due not to aesthetic considerations — there were no champions for its architecture — but because it provided shops and access from the streets on different levels, all under cover. The *Architects' Journal* commented:

> 'The well known Birmingham developer Jack Cotton has dismissed upper level walkways and upper level shopping at Piccadilly Circus as utterly impractical. But in Birmingham those well known London developers Laing Investment Company have incorporated both these ideas with whole hearted enthusiasm in their scheme for the Bull Ring centre'.[75]

But there was also fierce contemporary criticism of the development. Leslie Ginsburg wrote in 1969:

> 'Traffic planning has played far too significant a part in central area redevelopment scheme in most of the region. Birmingham, with its inner ring road, is the supreme example of this: toothpaste-strip building lining ringways, and the Bull Ring, bold, brash and exciting though it may be compared with Coventry's more anaemic precincts, is impossible for any but the able-bodied to get in, under, over, or around its maze of highways and pedestrian tunnels. It also succeeds in being the ultimate in traffic failure too, with the police controlling entry to the enormous traffic gyratories to avoid complete clog up'.[76]

The 1960s Bull Ring has recently been demolished and redevelopment is taking place on what is said to be the largest building site in Europe. It will be developed with a mixture of buildings for commercial, retail, office and some residential use, by 2003. The Selfridges department store, designed by Future Systems, will be one of the major buildings on the site, but nothing is to be so tall or bulky as to dominate views of the adjacent St Martin's church.

74 Pevsner and Wedgwood 1966, 122.

75 *Architects' Journal* (4 February 1960), 188.

76 *Architectural Review* (January 1969), 7.

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14
THE ROTUNDA BIRMINGHAM

COORDINATES

Address:	*New Street, Birmingham*
Date:	*1964–65*
Architect:	*James A. Roberts*
Height:	*271 feet (67m)*

ACCOUNT

When architect James Roberts prepared a model for the Bull Ring site, he included offices, a restaurant, open market bus station and car parks and the Rotunda office block, with a round flat disc on top, 'forming a climax to the entry to the city'.[77] It was to be matched on another part of the site by a car park and hotel complex. In an interview many years later, Roberts explained how the idea of the Rotunda came about: 'As it was at the top of a hill and it had no back or front it struck me that the building should be circular like a drum'.[78] A revised scheme by Sydney Greenwood and T. J. Hirst was accepted by the Birmingham Public Works Committee in January 1960.[79]

The Rotunda is a twenty-four storey cylindrical building set on a single-storey, cantilevered podium raised on pilotis. The concave form of the end of the podium contrasts with the circular tower, which is constructed of reinforced concrete and clad in mosaic. It is sited on top of a hill above the Bull Ring site, near New Street station, providing a focal point in the city centre. It provides accommodation for two floors of shops, two floors for a bank, a floor for the bank's strong room, sixteen office floors and two floors for services, plus a parapet. The two banking floors have a colonnaded front elevation in white rustic marble slips; the rest of the tower is clad in fine white glass mosaic, with aluminium sash windows. Inside, in the banking hall on the first floor of the podium, is local artist John Poole's abstract mural in *ciment fondu,* a form of cast concrete wrapped around the drum.

The building is built in close proximity to a railway tunnel, which presented structural problems. These were solved by concentrating the main load on to a twin ring of piled foundations directly beneath the circular structural core, and by supporting the floors on both the core and the perimeter columns.

James A. Roberts was a local architect who worked extensively for the property company Ravenseft, not only in Birmingham but elsewhere in England. Roberts had

77 *Architects' Journal* (1 Oct 1959), 293.

78 *Life* (5 March 1995), 28.

79 *Architects' Journal* (4 February 1960), 188.

been the contemporary of another prominent Birmingham architect John Madin at the Birmingham School of Architecture, in the 1940s. His first significant work for the city was the Smallbrook Ringway development of 1959, a continuous six-storey block of shops and offices. The *Architects' Journal* commented in 1959 that 'the architect has done his best with an almost impossible site, a thin strip of ribbon development fronting an urban motor road'.[80]

Roberts, having returned from a visit to the covered malls of the east coast of America and Montreal, also designed the Woolworth's store, shops and open market between the Bull Ring centre and the Rotunda, on several interlocking levels, thereby solving the problem of the gradient. He also designed St Martin's House in the Bull Ring (1961), 'a straight forward office block with a multi-storey car park adjoining'.[81] A better building by Roberts is Triplex House at King's Norton, Birmingham (1966), a square tower of ten storeys with anonidised aluminium curtain wall, set on a podium. But he is best known for the Rotunda and the St James's Centre, along with the revolving tower restaurant in Liverpool (1966).[82]

Contemporary and Recent Comment

The Rotunda was the most distinctive building in the complex at the Bull Ring, dominating the skyline, as it does today. Pevsner and Wedgwood applauded its 'splendid design for its position'.[83] Owen Luder was more critical, describing the Bull Ring scheme in general as 'too disparate ... champagne without the bubbles'; he said of the Rotunda in particular that 'the proportions of the block are too squat and could have been considerably improved by glazing the spandrels to reduce the striped effect'.[84]

The Rotunda was listed in 2000 at grade II, with the recommendation that 'this landmark in Birmingham is one of the most significant 1960s landmarks, ranking alongside Centre Point and Trellick Tower as an icon of the period'.[85] A straw poll carried out at the time of the proposals for redevelopment in the area indicated 'a surprising degree of affection for the Rotunda ... The Rotunda has become central to Birmingham's self-image, and its listing has been warmly welcomed'.[86]

Nicola Coxon from Birmingham City Council particularly admires the relationship of concave podium to cylindrical tower, an aspect not easily appreciated unless viewed close up, and welcomes the new powers of control over future changes.

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80 *Architects' Journal* (1959), 62.

81 Pevsner and Wedgwood 1966, 123.

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83 Pevsner and Wedgwood 1966, 122.

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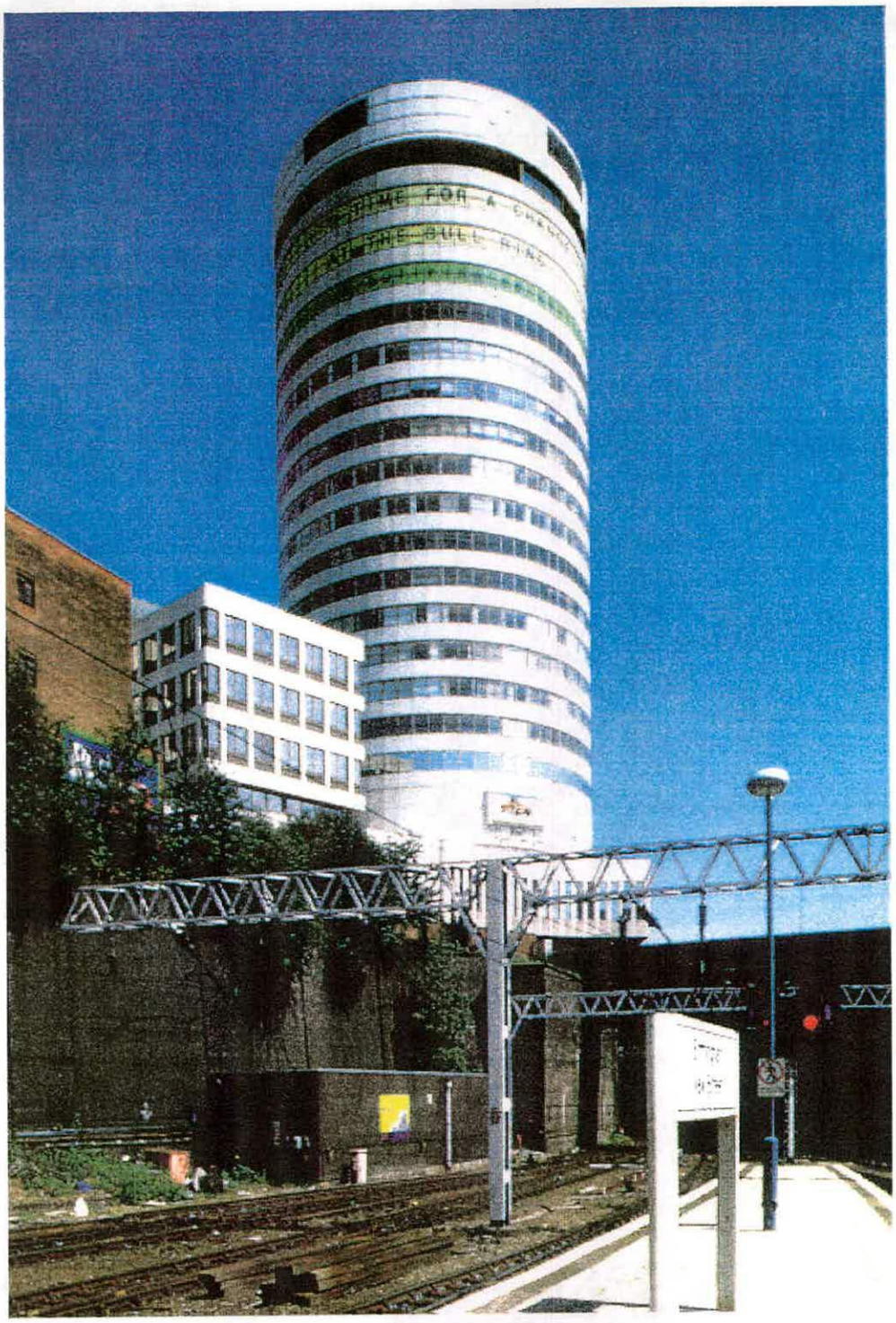

Fig. 14 The Rotunda, New Street, Birmingham, by James A. Roberts, 1964–65.

15
BIRMINGHAM POST AND MAIL BUILDING

COORDINATES

Address:	*Colmore Circus, Birmingham*
Architect:	*John Madin & Partners*
Engineer:	*Roy Bolsover*
Date:	*1962–65*
Height:	*215 feet (66m)*

ACCOUNT

This is a group of inter-connected buildings for the Birmingham Post and Mail group, publishers of an evening and daily newspaper. A long low block of four storeys provided complete facilities for printing, editorial and production of the newspapers and, across a courtyard, a tower block of seventeen floors for commercial offices and lettable space. The tower block has a reinforced concrete frame enclosed with dark grey glass with aluminium mullions; the office section is of glass, marble, black granite stone, and large aggregate terrazzo, and the works section is in stone bush-hammered concrete and pre-cast louvres. The office tower, entered at the side of the courtyard, was designed to provide accommodation for sub-letting and a director's flat. The floors are cantilevered out from the main columns and enclosed by a light curtain wall. The mullions are clad in silver anonidised aluminium, with horizontal black glazing bars. The tower 'rests' on a podium with a recessed floor immediately above the podium clad in Carrara and Serpentine marble, with a roof terrace, production rooms and editorial offices. The unglazed press machine hall at one end of the podium block is sunk 60 feet (18m) below ground.

John Madin was the most successful architect working in Birmingham in the 1960s. He trained at the Birmingham School of Architecture and came to prominence in the 1950s with his housing work on the Calthorpe and Gooch estates in Edgbaston, which included a mixture of tallish (twelve-storey) blocks, and lower ones, in a landscaped setting. He designed the Yorkshire Post building in Leeds *c.* 1970, but the Birmingham Post and Mail is deemed his most prestigious and successful commission.

CONTEMPORARY AND RECENT COMMENT

The height of the tower did not excite comment. Pevsner and Wedgwood commented in the *Buildings of England* volume for Warwickshire: 'The building is marked by characteristic good detail and good use of materials'.[87] The *Architects' Journal* considered that 'its refined proportions and crisp outline contrast with the

87 Pevsner and Wedgwood 1966, 123.

stodgy bulk of adjacent buildings' and the reporter admired the way that the building functioned well.[88] *Interiors* also commented on this aspect of the building's success, and added that 'the architects should be credited with ... providing Birmingham with a building which is very complete, very well constructed and sensitively detailed'.[89]

Elain Harwood of English Heritage was also struck by the successful fulfillment of a brief to provide office space with heavy plant, and with an ergonomic flow of production: 'In its balance of light and heavy, its style and its use of materials, it compares most closely with the contrasted units of the Economist complex'.[90]

The Birmingham Post and Mail Building was recommended for listing at grade II but was turned down. It is now threatened with demolition.

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88 *Architects' Journal* (8 December 1965), 1386.

89 *Interiors* (January 1966), 9.

90 English Heritage internal report (1997), HA&RT Out County file: OUT 239.

Fig. 15 Birmingham Post and Mail Building, Colmore Circus, Birmingham, by John Madin & Partners, 1962–65.

16
THE ALPHA TOWER
BIRMINGHAM

COORDINATES

Address:	*Broad Street, Birmingham*
Date:	*1970–72*
Architect:	*Richard Seifert & Partners*
Engineers:	*Oscar Faber & Partners*
Height:	*328 feet (100m)*

ACCOUNT

Siefert's contact with Birmingham began in 1962 when he prepared a scheme with T. J. Hirst for a development on Smallbrook Ringway. The scheme, which included a 200 feet (61m) rectangular office block, a theatre, restaurant and night club, was illustrated in the *Architect and Building News* on 17 January 1962.

In January 1969, the *Architectural Review* published Seifert's plan for the 'Paradise Centre', an entertainment complex including a centre for Associated Television. The site was located at Suffolk Street and Broad Street. It was set to be the largest post-war development in Birmingham, financed by Bentray Investments Ltd, and was to include a conference hall, shops, air terminal, hotel and offices. The *Architectural Review* illustrated Seifert's extraordinary design for the centrepiece of the development, a thirty-storey office block linked to a lower hotel block, which, on plan, would form a long continuous zigzag. This gave the impression of a curve, but the facets were straight. The soaring tower was shown rising up from splayed piloti and tapering to a thin flat top. The design was very much in the bold spirit of the Seifert office of the late 1960s, where confidence in prefabrication led to imaginative designs, more sculptural than Centre Point. An example was the scheme for a hotel in Cromwell Road, London, published in *Building* in 1968, where the floor levels are stepped in a curved line like a mountain range. This was only partially built, as a single, angular prism-like block called the Penta Hotel, completed in 1973.[91]

The Paradise Centre was due to be built between August 1968 and July 1969. Delay occurred because the General Post Office and the City Council objected to the proposed height of thirty-five storeys (350 feet; 107m), and recommended a reduction to thirty storeys (300 feet; 91m). There was some objection from councillors to 'the monstrosity' which would overshadow the central library scheme beginning on the adjacent site.[92]

Eventually the linked hotel block was abandoned, and just the single tower, the

91 For which, see Cherry and Pevsner 1991, 520.

92 *Building* (23 August 1968), 75.

Alpha tower office block, was built and completed by 1972. It was a twenty-eight storey block raised on heavy piloti, similar to earlier Seifert projects in London, such as Tolworth Tower (1962–65) and Centre Point (1961–66). But what is distinctive about the Alpha tower is the zig-zagged or rhomboidal plan, which remains dramatic despite the loss of the second block. It is built of steel with pre-cast reinforced concrete floor units which gives the exterior a regular fenestration but enlivened with splayed vertical components. It has a central core containing the lifts and the floors are cantilevered out from this core. The pillars are clad in tilework.

There is nothing of particular interest in the interior, but the building, although quite different from Seifert's original design, remains unaltered. The building is locally listed and becomes eligible for listing in 2002. The Birmingham Planning Department is currently located in the building.

Apart from the tower, the television studio block was built, but was not considered a worthy building. The *Architects' Journal* commented: 'Its contribution to the city's architecture is negligible: the studio block offering two unremarkable elevations to the street'.[93]

Another Seifert design was published in the *Architects' Journal* in 1971, which showed a square tower on a podium for Hill Street in Birmingham city centre. Richard Seifert also submitted a large-scale development scheme for the General Post Office site, which included a tall tower and described in *Building* in 1972 as 'the best piece of sculptured architecture in the Midlands'. This proposal alarmed the Victorian Society and the post office was listed. In 1972, Seifert produced designs for a curving block of offices for Swan's at Yardley, Birmingham, made of pre-cast concrete and curved spandrel panels. Later, Seifert moved away from the use of concrete for cladding towards more traditional materials such as brick and granite, in buildings such as the National Exhibition Centre and Metropole Hotel in Birmingham (both of 1975).

A recent redevelopment scheme surrounding the tower, The Arena Central scheme, a mixed use scheme including a tall building next to the Alpha tower, has caused concern amongst conservationists, councillors and members of the public. It was called in for a public inquiry, but despite objections, the inspector deemed the scheme to be acceptable in February 2000, and the details of the mixed-use scheme (shopping, offices, residential and leisure) are currently being worked up. Controversial plans to enclose the space under the piloti at the base of the Alpha tower have been abandoned. The new tower can be no higher than 575 feet (175m), which is considerably taller than the Alpha tower. Its proposed location next to the latter is not a popular idea with those who like the near all-round view of the Alpha tower, and its setting in an open space or piazza, which was part of Seifert's original scheme as published in the *Architectural Review*.[94]

Contemporary and Recent Comment

Leslie Ginsburg, writing about new architecture in Birmingham in 1969,

93 *Architects' Journal* (20 October 1971), 857.

94 *Architectural Review* (January 1969), 42.

commented on Seifert's proposed tower (i.e. not the tower as built) in the *Architectural Review:*

> 'Richard Seifert's predictably precast unit in tower and minitower form, will command a view of and be seen from the Civic Centre. Tapering as it climbs, it is likely to make James Roberts's earlier Rotunda at the Bull Ring seem small and squat by comparison. As with the Centre Point in London, its external frame will excite and its detailing will probably disappoint'.[95]

Later comment has been markedly more sympathetic. Architectural historian and critic Gavin Stamp was a great admirer of Seifert's piloti, 'not just ordinary boring upright columns but extraordinary facetted sculptural forms, of great dynamic power'.[96]

Whereas *Building* commented:

> 'Beauty executed in top quality materials, this building combines sharp edges and impressive geometry resulting in an elegant and slender office block which is deceptively complex. Its softly curving form is supported on abstractly shaped chamfered piloti. Alpha Tower boasts a lightness and transparency which refers back to office design in the 1950s'.[97]

And *The Birmingham Post* felt:

> 'With its knife-like edge fronting Centenary Square and its irregular sides unified by smooth glazing, this remains a dramatic presence today and arguably the only building to make a really bold and modernist statement in the city centre'.[98]

As illustrated by the listing of Centre Point in 1995, Richard Seifert's work is no longer seen as the black sheep of post-war architecture. The Alpha tower has gained admirers and champions since it was built, and it would appear to be a strong candidate for listing when it becomes eligible in 2002.

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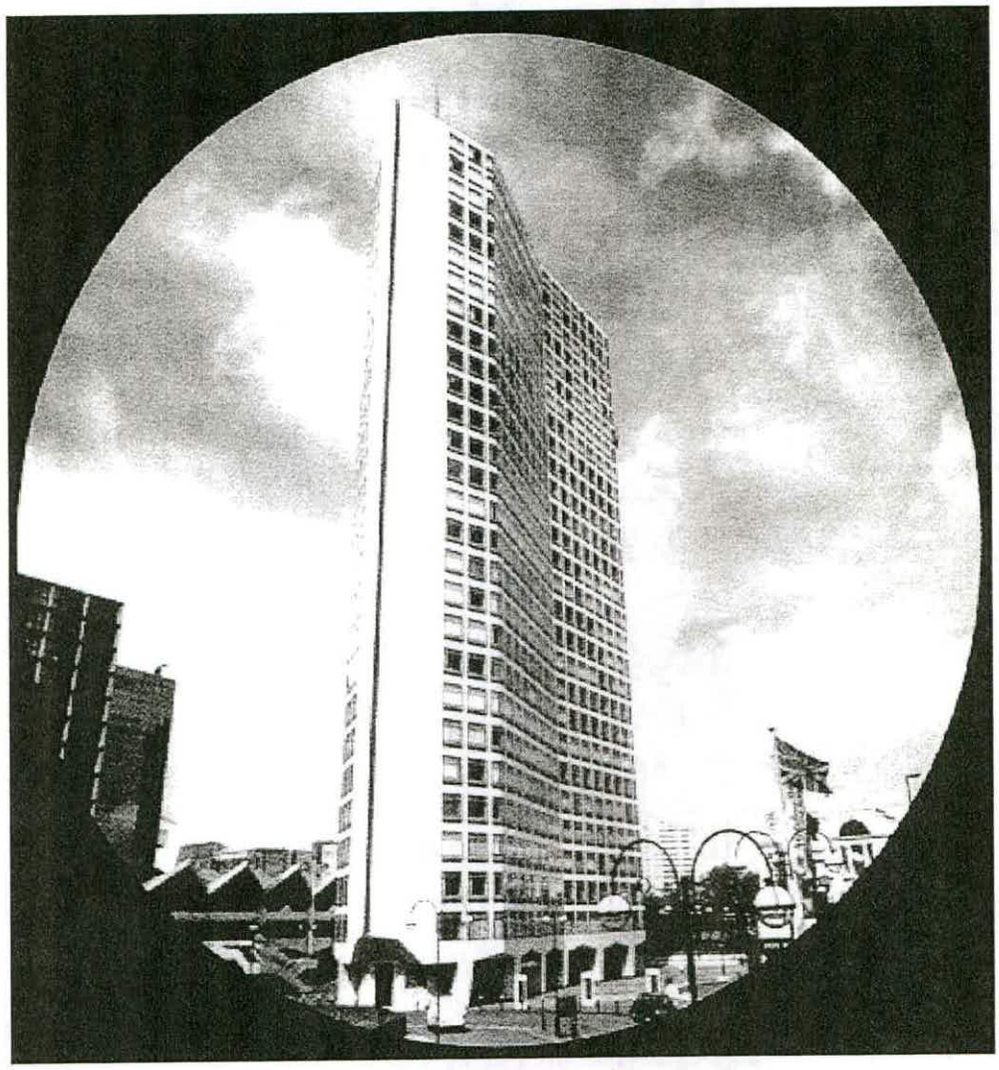

Fig. 15 The Alpha Tower, Broad Street, Birmingham, by Richard Seifert & Partners, 1970–72.

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