Tall Buildings
in the London Landscape

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Institute of Historical Research,
Senate House, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HU

Abstracts of Papers

Derek Keene: *Building tall in London, 1066–1666*

The paper will consider the reasons for building tall in London and the significance of tall buildings in the city's landscape between the Norman Conquest and the Great Fire.

In order to secure London the Normans added two great fortresses within the existing circuit of walls, one to the east and one to the west. Throughout the period the Tower of London was among the tallest buildings in the city, to which it was commonly regarded as a threat, but the impression it made on the skyline was diminished by its low-lying site. These towers, together with the city walls, bastions and gateways, were a key element in the city's image, as represented in text and drawing. Mythological accounts of London added further tall towers, gates and episodes of fortification.

Even in 1086, St Paul's cathedral may have been taller than the Tower and certainly occupied a more prominent site. The new cathedral, erected after the fire of 1087 was more bulky and, once its spire had been completed, much taller: there appears to have been no taller building in London until 1964. The religious and cosmological ideas which informed this structure, likewise explain the tall towers of the many other churches in the city, which by 1220 had become a prominent feature rising well above the general level of building.

Many residential and commercial buildings were also tall. Some private residences and guildhalls were certainly as bulky as the larger parish churches. Developments in timber-framing around 1200 allowed houses to be built higher than before, thereby increasing the density of population. Some aristocrats and mercantile super-rich built tall so as to express their status or reputation, but usually on sites away from the busy frontages. Some of these residences included towers, but towers of the extraordinary heights and numbers achieved in some Italian cities were not a feature of London, which was not so riven by faction and civil conflict (nor was it so rich). One purpose of these London towers was recreational, to provide access to light and air and a view across the city. Lesser mercantile and shopkeeper houses developed similar features, on the 'leads' of the roof, in turret rooms above the main roof, and on the flat roofs of turrets. These spaces allowed distinctive types of sociability between neighbours and, in processional zones, opportunities for observation and display. Enjoyment of the sublimity of height was a feature of London culture, especially in relation to St Paul's, while London Bridge and the structures upon it were designed to convey an impression of height to those who approached the city up river.

Christine Stevenson: *Vantage-points in the seventeenth-century City*

In July 1606 Christian IV of Denmark–Norway made a public visit to London, thereby cementing the Oldenburg–Stuart alliance formed when James VI of Scotland married Christian's sister Anne in 1589. Since then James had acquired another country, England, and with it new diplomatic headaches; Christian had in 1599 vowed to do the City's merchants 'great hurt' on account of trade and maritime disputes that would continue for more than a decade. For that reason, we suppose, attention was devoted in the printed accounts of the 1606 visit to representing Christian's pleasure at the 'prospect and full view' of London's wealth and commercial activity from two vantage-points, the roof of St Paul's Cathedral, and the upper gallery of the Royal Exchange. That is, delight was by implication tempered by the realization that he had a formidable adversary in the City's mercantile élite. The gaze from on high was not always a sovereign one (though according to John Stow, writing at the end of the sixteenth century, householders keenly resented being 'overlooked'); indeed, the dazzled foreign visitor becomes a familiar figure in later seventeenth-century civic panegyric. The reconstruction consequent to the Fire of 1666 was a powerful stimulus to celebrating civic prospects, and Hooke and Wren's 62-metre Monument (1671–77) to God's providential mercy was also a platform from which to witness the man-made glories of the rebuilt City.

Taking Christian's experience as its point of departure, the proposed paper examines the use of tall buildings as vantage-points in the seventeenth-century City, and the way that use was itself represented. Buildings' height (Old St Paul's' spire, for example) had for centuries prompted civic and parish pride; they also served as platforms for observers, and for performers, on civic and state occasions. More recent were the printed 'prospects' of the City deploying a bird's-eye view that might also be a view provided by a tall building, but if so the buildings are not specified. Beginning with Frans Hogenberg's engraving (*c*.1569) of Gresham's Exchange, which includes an enormous (and presumably never built!) Corinthian column with a tiny figure gazing out from on top of the capital, our interest will be in depictions, both verbal and visual, of tall buildings, not in prospects *per se*. In showing the observers, these depictions however celebrate particular buildings by connoting the views they afforded, while at the same time explaining their contributions to the skyline, beginning to come into prominence at the end of the century as a discursive object (one which reconciled Wren to the 'Gothicism' of church towers and spires). This short paper would assert, rather than argue, the changes that the seventeenth-century City saw in relation to its celebrations of vantage-points. These include the construction of the figure of the foreign visitor, mentioned above, one encouraged by the early Stuarts' concern to regulate London's growth; increasing specificity when it came to individual buildings and the observer's experience, both enabled by a new print culture powerfully stimulated by the pervasiveness, and glamour, of architectural metaphor after the monarchy's 'restoration' (1660) and then the Fire; the accident of the Fire itself; and finally the sharpening of civic claims for autonomy in the wake of increasing political, religious, and economic divergences between City and court interests, tensions already latent in the way that King Christian visit was explained to posterity.

Senaka Weeraman and Ken Kiss: *Reviving Brunel's lost water tower: introducing a different perspective for London*

The paper investigates the impact of a new 'tower' being proposed on the foundations of Brunel's water tower in Crystal Palace Park. It is part of a regeneration plan 1 that concentrates on the cultural identity of the park and its local community. Through an intensive process of research, public consultation and negotiation, this intervention initiated a critical discourse on the role of history and memory in our urban environment.

When the Crystal Palace was relocated to Sydenham, it provided a perfect opportunity for Joseph Paxton to landscape the gardens into a 'living encyclopedia'. When he was unable to power his grand fountains, he consulted Brunel who designed two cast-iron towers, 284 feet high, 47 feet wide, able to contain over 500 tonnes of water.

The fountains however were filled in as they became too expensive to maintain and the water towers were consequently used as viewing galleries and offices.[1] The South Tower for example was used as a laboratory by John Logie Baird. The two towers survived the great fire but were later dismantled in 1941. The Crystal Palace Museum was opened next to the base of the South Tower and awarded a blue plaque for Baird's achievements.

After examining the complete history of the park including the site's most recent environmental conflict, a master plan was developed to dynamically evoke these memories by constructing a series of pavilions and reconstructions, designed using original drawings of the Palace. Once placed at specific sites of historical importance, they begin to reveal these hidden narratives by the stories they contain.[2]

The South Tower has an important role in this plan, as it revives its function as a viewing gallery to access the unparalleled vistas of London and Kent.[3] By analyzing planning and environmental legislation, and public/private consultation, the proposal tries to negotiate a possible construction on the existing foundation using the methodology of the memory park.[4]

The tower would therefore be limited to the specifications of the original tower and be produced from original engineering drawings. In essence, it could be a straight forward reconstruction of Brunel's design, but it opens the possibility of creating a new form using the original details.

The proposal reuses a forgotten site, integrating it with the museum and creating a new landmark for the area in the process. But there are serious repercussions for the built environment and local community, especially when attempting to rebuild a tower that has been absent for over seventy years.

The proposal therefore tries to encourage transparent, democratic interaction to inform the design process and provide a platform from which issues such as sustainability and form/function can be openly discussed. We hope that a glass tower on the Brunel's foundations will be seen as a progressive development that truly reflects the past, present and future, hence marking a new paradigm in our urban consciousness.

[1] *Mnemonic Park – park of memory: a proposal for the Crystal Palace Park*, Senaka Weeraman, 2002

[2] *Palace for the People: The Crystal Palace at Sydenham*, Jan Piggott, 2004

[3] *Archaeological assessment of Crystal Palace Park*, Ken Kiss, 1998

[4] *The Crystal Palace, the museum and the mnemonic park*, Senaka Weeraman, 2002

Richard Dennis: *'Babylonian Flats' in Victorian and Edwardian London*

In *Howards End*, E.M. Forster discusses the plight of the Schlegel sisters whose town house in 'Wickham Place' is first overshadowed by neighbouring 'Wickham Mansions' and then threatened with redevelopment to make way for 'Babylonian flats'. When the first, eleven-storey, part of Queen Anne's Mansions was erected in the late 1870s, *The Builder* described them as 'Babel-like', and a decade later, when it was proposed to extend them both laterally and vertically, the architect and local resident, James Knowles, decried them as a "totally inacceptible [sic] tower of Babel" and conjured up visions of the apocalyptic consequences "which such a Babel, if on fire, would produce".

This paper examines the controversy associated with the building of Queen Anne's Mansions and other, more modest, but equally contentious schemes for flat-building, especially in the vicinity of the royal parks, and their role in the introduction of height restrictions in London Building Acts in 1890 and 1894. But it also focuses on the social aspects of 'Babel' – the implications of a confused proliferation of different classes and ethnicities. Drawing on census records, ratebooks and directories, the paper analyses the foreign and cosmopolitan clientele and workforce of Queen Anne's Mansions. A reading of contemporary newspapers and trade journals also allows discussion of the marketing and management of the building in the early twentieth century when it continued to attract regular condemnation from architects and planners while featuring just as regularly in press reports on its celebrity residents.

While there were many six-storey blocks of mansion flats and model dwellings in central London by the 1890s, especially in and around Victoria Street, at double their height Queen Anne's Mansions stood head and shoulders above them all. As such it was the first residential building in London in which living at the top was marketed as an attraction, a prototype for more recent images of luxury penthouse living. Analysis of rental advertisements in *Flats*, *Flatland* and *The Times* allows a quantitative evaluation of the premium attached to high-rise living in the early twentieth century.

The imposition of height limits from the 1890s meant that Queen Anne's Mansions remained as a solitary 'dinosaur' through the first half of the twentieth century, an indication of how London might have

come to resemble New York. Latterly, the building of London Transport headquarters at 55 Broadway, immediately across the street from Queen Anne's Mansions, provided another indication of New York come to London, its sophisticated step-backs and external sculptures only serving to emphasise the crude utilitarianism of the Mansions' plain brick exterior, and implying that, had the Mansions not been quite so ugly, London's high-rise history might have developed differently in the early twentieth century.

Jane Boyd: *Senate House Tower – the Capital's First Skyscraper*

In 1931, a vision for the University of London was enshrined in a massive building project undertaken by the architect Charles Holden (1875–1960) in Bloomsbury. In 1937 with half the campus still to build, the project was scrapped. However, the monumental tower of Senate House remains a solid, tiered, 64m (210ft) construction entirely suspended above the ground. Indeed the space beneath is a public right-of-way generating continuous movement to and from Malet Street and Russell Square which are separated only by swing doors. The Senate House was for many years *the* London skyscraper; it became the Ministry of Information during WW2 (Mini-info) and four years later inspired the Ministry of Truth (Minitrue), the offices of Winston Smith in "Ninety Eighty-Four" by George Orwell in 1949. The interior fixtures, fittings and typography were redeployed by Holden throughout the London Underground and now provide the quintessence of London's identity. Whether it is "undecided modernism" (Niklaus Pevsner), Charles Holden's work which includes many underground stations, has become part of the psycho-geographical framework of millions of people over generations living and/or working in London. In December 2006, the exterior of Senate House provided a blank canvas for me to launch visually[1] new work which takes a fresh look at urban London and explores the meaning of the word, "city", and how it translates from a peopled urban environment to a place where buildings acquire a metaphysical significance resistant to change and spaces resonate with sensation. This paper will look at the extent to which a) social reformer and economist William Beveridge achieved his vision for the University and b) Charles Holden's "life sentence",[2] succeeded in contributing to the capital's architectural legacy of tall buildings.

[1] http://www.janeboyd.co.uk/projections.html

[2] Holden's description of the commission by the Court and Senate of the University.

Leslie Budd: *Between the Earth and the Sky ? The discourses of architects and engineers in 1970s*

In the 1960s and 1970s the architect Richard Seifert was seen by many as the *bete noir* of the architectural profession. This status was manifested in the protests surrounding one of his more well known buildings in central London: *Centre Point*. For many, this building became the physical focus of the evils of rentier capitalism prevailing at the time. Seifert's reported ambition was to be the most well known architect since Christopher Wren. His impact on the topography of many cities in the UK remains with us today. Examples include: *Nat West Tower* (now Tower 42) and *King's Reach Tower* in London as well as *Alpha Tower* (now City Centre Tower) in Birmingham.

Seifert and Partners worked closely with Pell Frischmann, a structural and civil engineering consultancy, to build many of his towers, which purportedly changed the skyline of London and other cities. Paradoxically, many of Seiferts' "reach for the sky" towers ultimately disappoint as buildings in the lack of good detailing when they touch the ground. In part this reflected working practices in which the structural needs overwhelmed the needs of good designs as a result of engineers completing design detail. The paradox is reinforced by the vision of Pell and Frischmann, the founders of the eponymous consultancy envisioned towers reaching beyond the clouds which would form part of cities and communities in the sky. For many years, the engineering problems of this project was studied in detail and included innovative heating and other utility services. This project appears to run counter to the view, at the time, that firms like Pell Frischmann acted as mere engineering functionaries to Seifert's towering (sic) ambitions. It also runs counter the former convention of architects and engineers having different cultures and discourses.

Richard Seifert died in 2001, whilst his practice lives on, but the name no longer rolls off the tongues of the interested public in the way that Rogers and Foster do today. The vision of the tower reaching for the

sky remains with us, enabling by innovative engineering solutions to the problem of height, for example Petronas Tower in Kula Lumpur. In the UK, the "failed vision" of Seifert and Pell Frschamman may have had more to do with modernity sitting uncomfortably in British culture, as well as an apparent aversion to reinforced concrete buildings. These considerations formed a limited part of the context for this paper. Drawing on personal experience of working for Pell Frschmann in the 1970s, it examines the working relationship of architects and engineers on a limited number of buildings in exploring the different yet ultimately complementary discourses in the pursuit of design solutions of the time. It concludes by asking whether technological and process innovation in constructing the built environment has tended to merge these discourses.

Lucy Markham: *The threat to views of St Paul's Cathedral and the transformation of the London skyline*

The preservation of views of St Paul's Cathedral and the future of the London skyline is a controversial subject. To the dismay of the conservation profession, the Mayor, Ken Livingstone, is liberalising London's view policies and making it easier to construct tall buildings in London. This dissertation considers the impact and effectiveness of the existing measures, and predicts the likely effect of the more lenient Greater London Authority (GLA) policies and the London View Management Framework (LVMF).

The St Paul's Height Code was introduced in 1934 following a campaign by Godfrey Allen, the Surveyor to the Fabric, in response to the construction of Faraday House which blocked views of the Cathedral from the south bank. The Code has been gloriously effective in preserving views of the Cathedral, even though it has created an excessively horizontal roofscape on the north bank.

RPG3A, the Regional Planning Guidance for London, was introduced in 1991 and protects long distance views of the Cathedral from various vantage points around the London Basin. Ostensibly RPG3A has also been effective: the demolition of Sudbury House has improved views of St Paul's from the northern heights, and the viewing corridors have influenced the location of individual and clusters of tall buildings. However, the recent judgement on the Shard, which will appear directly behind St Paul's in protected views from Parliament Hill and Kenwood, reveals its feebleness.

The LVMF will more than halve the width of most viewing corridors (from 440m to 210m). This will erode the setting of St Paul's. Local views inadvertently protected by the existing corridors may be lost. There will be no geometric height limit on tall buildings in the backdrop of views of St Paul's, so the silhouette of the dome on the skyline is no longer secure.

This dissertation analyses recent consents for tall buildings, including Swiss Re (popularly known as the Gherkin), the Heron Tower, the Shard and Vauxhall Tower. Decision-makers are not being persuaded by conservation arguments. This is partly due to mistakes made by English Heritage, and partly because of the current political climate where decision-makers regard heritage as a low priority. Quality of design is a key justification for tall buildings, which is heartening, although it should not override other considerations.

New policies should define the appropriate location for tall buildings, enable the modelling of clusters, and bring about a more effective and democratic management of the skyline.

Michael Short: *Tall building management in London: success or failure in enhancing the character of London?*

Tall building proposals are becoming an increasingly familiar part of the rapid growth of the world's major cities. In London, where the Mayor is keen to bolster the city's status as a world financial centre, tensions and conflicts around the management of tall buildings at the metropolitan level and upon particular areas, monuments or views of merit have taken centre stage in the debate about the city's future form. The character of London is changing rapidly in a context of weak government support for the conservation of the historic environment and the positive promotion of tall buildings in particular parts of the city, most notably in the City of London and Canary Wharf but also along the length of the Thames from Kingston in the west to the Thames Gateway in the east.

This paper will examine the context for the growth in tall building proposals in London over the last 15 years looking at the institutional and policy context for tall building management and attempts at positively directing tall buildings to particular parts of the city. Firstly, it will examine attempts at providing a planning context for tall building decision making through mechanisms such as CABE-English Heritage's *Guidance on Tall Buildings*, the Mayor's *View Management Framework* and the approach of individual London boroughs such as the City of London and Southwark in attempting to restrict individual buildings from sensitive areas. Secondly, it will examine the key tensions in the assessment of tall building proposals looking in particular at the heritage dimension of individual proposals. In particular the paper will explore the idea that for effective tall building management to take place, an approach to decision making about individual proposals needs to be adopted which accepts that notions about the 'character of place' should be central to both planning strategy and policy, and assessment and decisions. Finally, the paper will attempt to draw out some tentative conclusions regarding the potential for planning policy and project assessment to shape the form of London at the local and metropolitan level. This will draw on empirical work undertaken as part of an English Heritage sponsored PhD completed in 2006 which looked at characterisation of place as a means to identify both what should be conserved and how tall buildings might enhance the character of London.

Andrew Harris: *Livingstone versus Serota: the high-rise battle of Bankside*

This paper will consider the controversy generated by the proposed construction of a residential high-rise at Hopton Street in Bankside: the so-called 'Tate Tower'. Drawing on interviews, architectural designs, planning documents and press reports, the paper will trace how original plans in 2001 by the developer London Town to build a 32 storey tower on the site of a former paper warehouse were subsequently downgraded to a 20 storey building. Despite planning permission being secured in 2003, nevertheless, the site has still to be redeveloped, and is currently owned by the Dutch company Meyer Bergman.

The paper will focus on how this proposed tower has led to a fractious battle between developers supported by a high-rise lobby led by Ken Livingstone, and local residents aligned with Sir Nicolas Serota's Tate Gallery. For Livingstone, the scheme is an important affirmation of his policies to increase London's residential density and recycle 'brownfield' land to create new 'affordable' housing. Furthermore, the proposed tower chimes with Livingstone's enthusiastic support for new architecturally sophisticated tall buildings as a way of symbolically reasserting London's position as a leading metropolitan centre both within Europe and internationally. However, the scheme's location directly outside the main entrance to the Tate Modern's Turbine Hall is seen by Serota as a cynical and opportunistic attempt to cash in for private gain on the public benefits that have been created by the arrival of the Tate in Southwark – as he suggests it would be like 'building a tower block in the forecourt of the British Museum'. Similarly, residents in surrounding apartment blocks have strongly objected to the proposed tower's impact on their views, daylight and property prices. Through Bankside Residents Against Tate Tower (BRATT) and Bankside Residents for Appropriate Development (BROAD), they have mounted a sophisticated campaign complete with mock wake outside the site in 2002 and a visit to the European Court of Human Rights in 2004.

Placing this conflict in the wider context of the rapid transformation and gentrification of inner London over the last decade, this paper will use the debate and discourses surrounding this scheme to explore some of the contractions bound up in recent publicly-funded cultural regeneration schemes such as the Tate. Likewise, the paper will use the proposed tower to consider some of the complex connections between the conservation of post-industrial landscapes, new international flows of people, capital and ideas and the increasing dominance of the City within London's metropolitan politics.

Maria Kaika: *Reinventing the icon: the political economy of reimagi(ni)ng the City*

Using the Corporation of London (CL) as a case study, the project examines how changes in the structure and ethnography of the CL affect the form, function and symbolism of architecture in the Square Mile. The paper aims to promote an understanding of the role of the Corporation of London as a planning authority and a patron of architecture.

Given its importance in London's economic and spatial development, it is surprising that the Corporation of London has received relatively little attention as an object of academic inquiry, with the exception of Kynaston's historical magnum opus (1994; 1995; 2000; 2005). This paper will attempt a social-historical-geographical study of the impact that the Corporation's policies have on London's new architecture. The paper will map the power relations between the Corporation, transnational elites (corporate, state, technical and consumerist), and policy advocacy groups, in the approval and commissioning of these buildings, and will investigate how this new power choreography affects 'urban landmarks' in the Square Mile, the buildings' relation to the city around them, the provision of public space in the Square Mile, the way the City is perceived and used by the public and the social role of architecture.

The paper also has two broader aims:

1) To link changes in the architecture of square mile to the changing ethnography of architectural patronage, highlighting the proliferation of iconic buildings as one expression of the involvement of transnational elites in the production of urban space; and
2) To develop theoretical insights into the part played by iconic buildings as nodal points of the new urban economy.