

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE POST OF CITY ARCHITECT AND PLANNING OFFICER, 1478-1965

The year 1478 is a particularly appropriate year to select as an introduction to this Paper for on the 21st of April of that year Edward Stone was chosen in Common Council as "Master of the Works of the City". His principal task was to undertake, with the advice and counsel of three aldermen and three commoners, aided by two clerks, the repair of the City Walls and the cleansing of the ditches.

In 1477 the state of the City's fortifications had become a matter of grave concern and so serious was the position that Ralph Josselyn, Mayor in 1476-77 had supplied vast quantities of bricks and lime and had spent much money for the repair of the walls. Orders had been given for the provision of labour and the levying of a rate on the inhabitants to meet the cost of the work and to ensure that this was efficiently carried out one person from each ward was chosen by the Mayor and Aldermen, and these in groups of six served this task in rotation. Stone's responsibility was to organise and supervise.

Edward Stone was a professional who had been trained as a carpenter and who, since 1457, had served as one of the four "City Viewers" sworn to return an unbiased award on building disputes and to deal with nuisances. Some indication of the esteem in which he was held may be judged from the fact that he was the first and only individual to hold the title and designation "Master of the Works of the City". On the 29th July 1479 his appointment was terminated by the Court of Aldermen, so well and in so short a time had he discharged his important trust as "Magister Operum".

John Coke was appointed his successor on the 4th October in the same year. His duties were far less specialised and less onerous and he was the first to be designated "Clericus operum Civitatis". He received a grant of 40s. a year, two liveries of the kind worn by the yeomen, and meat and drink in the household of the Mayor for the time being.

The duties of the Clerk of the Works included daily oversight of the workmen and materials, their wages and costs which he certified to the Comptroller, but no works could be undertaken without warrant by the Chamberlain. From 1550-1650 the Clerk of the Works was also "Keeper of

the reparacion stuffe".

We can obtain a fair cross section of the duties carried out by the Clerk of the Works in the mid 17th century by bills dealt with by John Cocke (1646-1661) e.g. £300 paid for timber bought for the City's use, £25.8s.4d. for disbursements caused by a fire in Tower Street, £6.12s.6d. for paving before a house in Bishopsgate Street, £71.4s.6d for gravelling the horseway along by the windmills in Moorfields. Nicholas Duncombe (1662-1676) was paid £2.16s.3d for cleansing the way from St. Paul's churchyard to Paul's Wharf ready for Lord Mayor's Day. Occasionally we get glimpses of incidents which caused charges to be brought against the Clerk of the Works. For instance Duncombe was temporarily suspended pending civic investigation and legal proceedings arising from the death of an unfortunate passer-by who fell into a hole in the road in Fleet Street which the Clerk of the Works had left insufficiently protected at night.

After the Great Fire, the City engaged many persons to assist in the various fields of building and reconstruction. Amongst these were the Surveyors of New Buildings, Hooke, Oliver, Mills and Jerman. These were busy setting out foundations, issuing certificates of land taken over for new streets and widening existing thoroughfares, and making surveys and layouts to the Order of the City.

John Leake, William Leybourn with others were employed to make a survey of the devastated areas. Leybourn as the City Measurer, as an additional duty was required to check the bills of the City artificers against his measurements. The Commissioners of Sewers who were responsible for Sewers and Pavings were empowered to appoint their own officers. The Clerk of the Works carried a heavy responsibility though he was, at that time, a fairly junior officer because much that he had to undertake was under the control of the Chamberlain and Comptroller. One thing is abundantly clear from the foregoing and that is that there was an increased emphasis on specialisation.

This is very clearly borne out in the appointment in 1693 of John Olley, Citizen and Glover, who at his admission took an oath prepared by the Town Clerk "... That all the workes and reparacions that you shall over See or be employed in be needfull and necessary and that they be done in Substantiall and workmanlike manner with good materialls and at the cheapest rates and that ye Signe no Bills but such as you knowe the worke mencioned to be done in manner Aforesaid ...".

Olley is the first Clerk of the Works of whose work any evidence survives. In 1698-1701 he was engaged in the design and rebuilding of Emanuel Hospital at Tothill Fields, Westminster which was under the government of the Lord Mayor and Aldermen. A charming drawing of the principal Elevation and a bird's eye view of the layout is to be found at the end of the Repertory where the Report appears. "I have drawne Drafts for rebuilding the said Hospitall and now find upon a measurement thereof it is hetherto built according to the Draft and according to the Proposals I made to your Worships touching the Thickness of Walls, Scantlings of Timber, Quality of Materialls and height of Storyes". Olley seems to have been the first Clerk of the Works to sign the plans which, since 1675, it had become customary to attach to City leases.

Some 23 years now elapsed before any radical changes took place and these changes were due to the appointment of George Dance, senior, followed by his son, George Dance, junior, who between them served the City as Clerk of the City's Works for a successive period of over eighty years. George Dance senior's appointment as Clerk of the City's Works (1734-1768) gave him a virtual monopoly of the City's architectural work and it was this official position, rather than any other qualifications, which in 1737 led to the acceptance of his designs for the Mansion House in preference to those of more eminent architects such as Gibbs, James and Leoni. The result in spite of its Palladian portico and "Egyptian" Hall displays neither scholarship nor sensibility. His best work was represented by his less pretentious municipal buildings and churches. It is recognised that he could also deal effectively with civic improvements and the Fleet Market and the Corn Exchange in Mark Lane and the alterations to London Bridge in conjunction with Sir Robert Taylor are highly competent. His churches include St. Leonard Shoreditch, St. Matthew's Bethnal Green and St. Botolph's Aldgate.

In 1768 he recommended his far more brilliant son, then aged 27, to the Court of Aldermen, "that he was regularly bred to the Business of a Surveyor and afterwards studied the Science of Architecture in Italy". George Dance, junior, (1768-1816) more than fulfilled his early promise proving that he could treat a simple building as effectively as a monumental one as exemplified in the designs of All Hallows church, London Wall and Newgate Prison. His brilliance is revealed also in his many bold and imaginative improvement schemes. He also produced a most dramatic, but unexecuted, design for the improvement of the Port of London which would have replaced London Bridge by a pair of twin bridges.

Due in particular to the younger Dance's great abilities the Corporation realised a revolutionary change in duties had occurred and an entirely new set of requirements was formulated. The Committee also decided that the duties should extend to all works arising out of Acts of Parliament in which the Corporation was concerned. The Committee appointed in 1815 to review these duties, when Dance, junior, proposed resignation, and comparing the conditions obtaining in 1815 with those of 100 years earlier, determined as follows: "That the Nature of the Office of Clerk of this City's Works has, from the change which has taken place and in the general Mode of transacting Business, materially varied since that period, and that the Office may now be considered as that of an Architect or Surveyor to this City".

Amongst the duties held appropriate to the Post in 1815 were the following: to attend the Court of Aldermen and Common Council and their Committees when required, taking instructions and making Reports and generally executing the business of the Corporation; to make Surveys and Valuations as required of Corporation property and of property to be purchased or Sold and to draw plans thereof; to make designs, plans, descriptions, estimates and working drawings for new buildings and repairs and to superintend the execution thereof; to make detailed estimates of repairs required to be done to Corporation property by tenants or to determination of leases; to supervise the bills of artificers and tradesmen; and to supervise the City Labourer to ensure that proper care was taken of materials.

William Mountague (1816-1843) had been a pupil of Dance, junior and in recommending him for the post he declared, "he has been constantly and actively employed in the City's business in my Office during the last 27 years". In 1814 he had been appointed Assistant Clerk of the Works to the Corporation but he had already in 1812 been appointed Surveyor to the City Improvement Committee and as such was responsible for the planning of Finsbury Circus in 1814. It is of particular interest that Montague was the first Clerk of the Works to be appointed by the Court of Common Council following the abolition of the system of purchase and alienation of the office which had operated in the 18th century, and the first to be paid an annual salary.

A proposal put forward in 1792 that a salary should replace a system of payment by percentage and gratuities had been thrown out, it being agreed that the volume of work varied so much from year to year that a fixed salary would be inappropriate. Although the rate was now set at £2,000 a year it

must be remembered that out of this he had to pay his assistants and bear the cost of all office expenses including stationery.

Among the buildings he designed were Whitecross Street Prison, the Courts of King's Bench and Common Pleas at Guildhall and Farringdon Market. He was also responsible for the removal of the attic storey above the Ballroom of the Mansion House in 1842 and for designing a new ceiling for the same apartments.

Besides these works he made the valuations for purchasing the property required for various improvements in the City, including the widening of St. Martin's le Grand and the erection of the new Post Office, and planned the formation of King William Street, and of Wellington Street in the Borough, as North and South approaches to London Bridge. He was similarly employed in clearing the site for the New Royal Exchange begun in 1841, and in valuations preparatory to the construction of Moorgate Street, Princes Street and Gresham Street. The enlargement of Smithfield Market was also carried out under his direction. He was District Surveyor for the Western division of the City and was Surveyor to the Thames Tunnel Company, the Estates of Sir Charles Morgan, the Sons of the Clergy and Baroness Von Zandt. The burden of work devolving on him on account of these extensive valuations was immense.

On his death in 1843, and largely on account of the burden of valuations, the Officers and Clerks Committee farsightedly recommended the separate appointment of a City Surveyor whose duties should include the management and leasing of the City Lands and Bridge House Estates and the work of reletting the Finsbury Estate whose numerous leases were shortly to fall in, and of an Architect. This proposal was rejected by Common Council whereupon the Committee recommended that the new Clerk of the City's Works ought to be an Architect of eminence and experience and suggested a salary of £2,500. The Court agreed but reduced the salary to £1,600 and appointed James Bunstone Bunning who had in 1837 designed the City of London School (demolished in 1882).

In 1846 his salary was raised to £2,500 and in 1848 a resolution was passed in the following terms "That at the Annual Election of Officers the present Clerk of the Works be denominated, what he really is, Architect and Surveyor of this Corporation". In 1852 it was recognised that his responsibilities in connection with the Clerkenwell Improvement Act justified his receiving a further £1,000 a year. In addition to designing the City of London School, Bunning was also responsible for the following

works - the Coal Exchange, Holloway Prison, the Metropolitan Cattle Market at Islington and the rebuilding at Billingsgate Market of 1849-53. He died in 1863. Common Council rejected a proposal of the Officers and Clerks Committee that his bust should be placed within Guildhall at a cost of 200 guineas and decided instead that a monumental tablet should be affixed in the Western entrance of the City of London School at a cost not exceeding 50 guineas.

The rejection in 1843 of the recommendation of separate appointments of Surveyor and Architect was to have strong repercussions as Common Council was for a very long period unable to make up its mind as to the qualifications it required for the holder of the combined appointment and the precise nature of the responsibilities they required to be vested in him. In 1863 the Court accepted a Report which advised that all public works and buildings to be undertaken by the Corporation should be open to competition and henceforth that Bunning's successor should be regarded as Surveyor and Clerk of the Works.

In spite of this, however, they appointed Horace Jones as Architect and Surveyor but at a reduced salary of £1,500. Jones was to be responsible for many buildings including London Central, Billingsgate and Leadenhall Markets, Guildhall Library and Museum, the timber roof to Guildhall 1865-66, the New Council Chamber, the Temple Bar Memorial and Tower Bridge. In 1882 he was elected President of the Royal Institute of British Architects and was knighted in 1886.

It is noteworthy that from the date of his appointment in 1863 the assistants in his office were appointed and paid by the Corporation. During the latter part of his career he was usually called City Architect. He was succeeded by Alexander Marshal Peebles who died in 1891 and was denied the opportunity of making any real impact.

When making their next appointment the Committee decided that Andrew Murray (1891-1905) should be designated City Surveyor. He was followed by Sydney Perks (1905-1931) who like his predecessor was a Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects. In addition he was an enthusiastic antiquary and his "History of the Mansion House" was not only a fully documented study of the building itself but also of the history of the site. He published the result of his findings on the development of Guildhall and also produced a series of Papers relating to early examples of Town Planning in the City after the Great Fire. His architectural work included

much on housing and dwellings for the Police and at his request his title was changed to City Architect and Surveyor.

The passing of the Town and Country Planning Act in 1932 imposed obligations on the Corporation and this together with concern as to post war reconstruction resulted in the appointment of Dr. C.H. Holden and Professor W.C. (later Lord) Holford as Consultants in 1945. The outcome was that in 1947 the Common Council decided to appoint a Planning Officer in charge of a Planning Department and Henry Anthony Mealand (1947-1961) was appointed. On his retirement, Edwin George Chandler was elected City Architect and in 1965 the post was redesignated City Architect and Planning Officer which date is the limit imposed by the title of this Paper.

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31.10.79