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The 4th Plinth proposals

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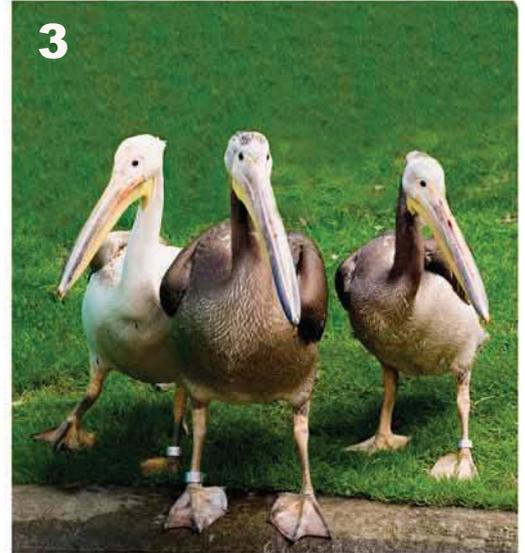
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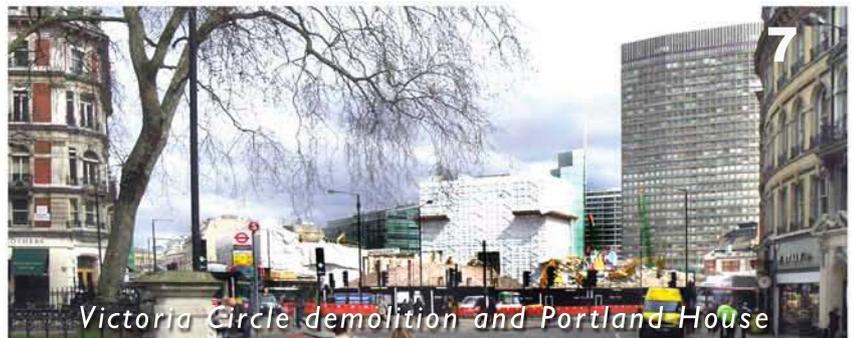
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Victoria Circle Demolition

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Victoria Circle demolition and Portland House

web site : www.thethorneyislandsociety.org.uk

The Thorney Island Society

Friends of St.James's Park and The Green Park

7has 30.04.13



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TTISNews : Welcome to the 'May' TTISNews which includes a range of topics with a lot on planning and the urban environment. This is inevitable since we are seeing the massive amount of demolition of so much character and history in Victoria Street and the Victoria triangle - euphemistically described as 'circle'. The Planning law changes have made it a charter for Developers; and it is yet to be seen whether 'local citizens' have any or less rights under the misnamed 'localism act'. Victoria Neighbourhood Area application, when and if it becomes accepted by WCC as a Neighbourhood, will have its Forum to be responsible for its Neighbourhood Plan prepared by locals; even though it is an area of interest to many residents outside the defined area, and to thousands who use the central part of Victoria daily .

The Royal Parks

We are exceptionally fortunate to have at the core of the Society's 'domain' St James's Park and The Green Park. Mark Wasilewski, Park Manager has written this issue's feature article. The care and attention that is required to maintain and provide for the various demands placed on the Royal parks is enormous. Last year with the people pressures from the Jubilee, the Games, the Marathon, and the New Year's Eve fireworks spectators, in addition to the numerous daily visitors requires skill and determination from the team, and its leader. Congratulations to Mark on receiving from the Queen the high award of the Royal Victorian Order - 'MVO'

The current Royal Parks regime is a voluntary Board chaired by Boris Johnson, with full-time Chief Executive Linda Lennon and her team. Linda is 'hands on' covering all the Royal

Parks areas. with all aspects. Her tasks are made more difficult as each year the Government cuts funding - a process that has been going on for the last few years. Few realise that the Parks are funded not by the Boroughs but by the Government and aided by commercial activities that each Park is able to arrange.

If it weren't for the Royal Parks Westminster Borough would not meet the national open space standards required by the Government; and yet the Borough makes little or no contribution. So when enjoying the Parks, bear in mind that to maintain the quality of the planting and its upkeep, there will be some more commercial activities; but these are subject to their being suitable and acceptable for those in the vicinity as well as for the 'wear and tear' of our wonderful St James's Park and The Green Park

Trafalgar Square : cock on the Fourth Plinth

The planning application for a huge blue Cockerel to stand motionless on the Plinth where currently there is boy on a rocking horse, seems 'bizarre'. Over a number of years there have been some questionable subjects but this is probably the one least appropriate. It is unrelated to the context of Trafalgar Square and adds nothing to it but a feeble distraction.

The only tenuous argument put forward is the artist's dubious claim that the "cockerel is a symbol for regeneration, awakening and strength". Some consider that it might be acceptable in Leicester Square, or on the South Bank; or possibly should be roosting in Battersea Park; but please not at the foot of Admiral Nelson. Of course there could be other points of view ?

Dates for your Diary

Summer Drinks Party 10th July 2013

The Pavillion Restaurant
Grange Rochester Hotel
69 Vincent Square London SW1P 2PA

Annual General Meeting 20th November 2013

The Wellington Suite
Grange Wellington Hotel
71-72 Vincent Square London SW1P 2PA

The Society needs active assistance in all our activities - it does not run itself, but by and through a rather too small diverse group from the membership. Please get in touch - modest help with secretarial, computing, editing, planning, environment, interests, walks and points of view - the historic area needs observers and interested citizens. YOUR SOCIETY NEEDS YOU

TTIS Feature : A Royal Parks retrospective

The Park Manager, Mark Wasilewski, writes of the pressures on St.James's Park and The Green Park during the great events of 2012 - the Diamond Jubilee Celebrations and the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

To the park visitor at the present time there is little remaining evidence that St James's Park played host to two significant events during 2012, The Queen's Diamond Jubilee Celebrations and to six sporting elements of the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Not only would these events attract hundreds of thousands of additional visitors but would also require huge areas to house the supportive infrastructure that comes with events of that size. Disruption was severe with a third of St James's Park closed off for the summer, including roads, pavements and cycle paths, as well as Inn the Park café. Even for the staff access was difficult, we all having to undergo airline security checks and banned from bringing in fluids during the Games

Damage from the associated infrastructure was inevitable. We had already re-laid new turf in front of Buckingham Palace immediately following the Diamond Jubilee Concert to ensure this area was looking its best for the Olympic Games. We also recognised post-Games that for the park to be in a fit enough state to support the heavy footfall expected in 2013 (our first major event of the year, the London Marathon, brings in the region of 130,000 people) we would need to lay new turf, rather than over-seed, and to have this laid during the autumn of 2012. A total of 9 acres or 3.6 hectares of new turf has been put down, all of which was paid for by the London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games. Little did we know that the rain, cold and overcast conditions would continue throughout the winter making establishment slow and the ground extremely soft. To our alarm it was evident that with these conditions there could be significant damage on New Year's Eve when thousands of revellers crowd St James's Park for view of the midnight fireworks. Negotiation with the GLA ensured that significant fencing was erected to protect the turf.

Fortuitous for us that in our publicity we were cautious enough to indicate the park re-opening by Easter, which bar a few small waterlogged areas we have achieved. Areas of the park are looking very green reminding us that "the hottest party in town" in 2012, the Beach Volleyball, is now but a distant and fond memory!

*Mark Wasilewski MVO, Park Manager
St James's Park and The Green Park.*

For more information on all the Royal Parks access the website

www.royalparks.org.uk/parks

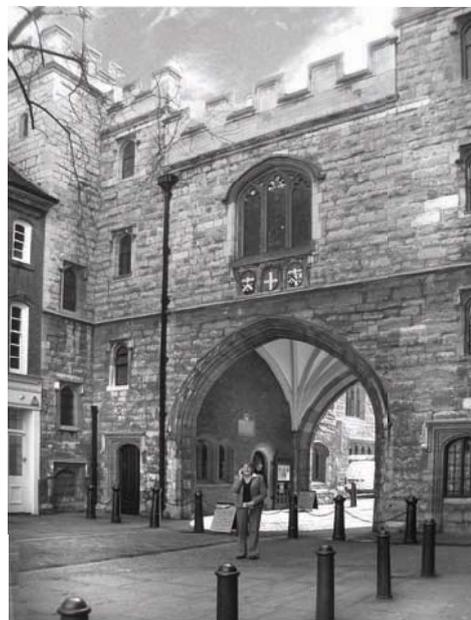


The Society's Visits Programme

continues to offer a wide range of interesting visits to different venues. On March 6th, the Society enjoyed a tour of St John Priory and its museum as described by Victor Keegan.

Few buildings in London have been as immersed in religious and literary history as the Priory of St John in Clerkenwell. Founded in 1140 it was the home of the Knights Hospitallers, the military monks who gave protection to pilgrims on their way to the Holy Land, until Henry VIII dissolved the monasteries in the late 1530s. Today it is the headquarters of St John Ambulance which carries on its historic mission of providing first aid helped by 40,000 volunteers in the UK alone.

Most of the buildings were demolished in the decades after the Dissolution with a lot of the stonework being hijacked later on for building Somerset House for Lord Protector Somerset. But, as we found on a fascinating tour of the priory gateway and its surrounds, much has somehow survived. The remains include a beautifully preserved Norman crypt dating back to the 1140s, one of the few surviving Norman remains in London, the lower walls of the chapel and the magnificent Gate House which deserves a chapter on its own. Although its Tudor bricks have now been clad with stone and some of the rooms reconstructed it still retains the atmosphere of the place where Shakespeare, Ben Jonson and other Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights would take their plays to be vetted for sedition by the Master of the Revels, Edmund Tilney. The complex of buildings around the gateway also housed the Gentleman's Magazine where Samuel Johnson cut his teeth and where William Hogarth's



St John Priory Gate House

father ran an unsuccessful coffee house which may have been something to do with a requirement that customers had to speak Latin. The Priory of St John extended to the west to what is now Farringdon Road and to the North to Clerkenwell Green after which the nunnery of St Mary, built at the same time as the priory extended up to today's Bowling Green Lane. Together they occupied nearly all of what we call Clerkenwell today. The trip was a great success and our thanks are extended to our guide John and to Pippa Parsons who organised

VictorKeegan <> victorkeegan@gmail.com

Visits Programme - May 2013 - December 2013

The programme of visits is on the TTIS web site, along with booking form
www.thethorneyislandsociety.org.uk

Enquiries can be made preferably by Email to
pippa.parsons@yahoo.co.uk, or 020 7222 2795
 or by text on the day 07791 413 453



The Thorney Island Society Dinners.

Pat Shroff writes of the past season while while keenly looking forward to September for the next

As many will know, between September and April each year, the Society arranges monthly Dinners for its members. A very enjoyable evening is assured, with a three course meal with wine, followed by a talk. The talks have as usual covered a wide range of subjects, ending with an absorbing and fascinating presentation on North Korea. However September and the new season will be with us very soon ! The details of the next season's programme will be out in good time for you to book - the dates are given below.

In March, Margaret Woodall, archivist (who has catalogued the papers of Humphrey Davy, Marconi, and the Harris family at Belmont, among others) gave members fascinating insights during her talk on 'Archives - Dust, Discovery & Delight'. TTIS Archive items which were made available for members to view after the talk included postcards from Queen Victoria's reign, framed photos and papers about the Suffragettes.

The previous month, Hatton Garden jeweller, Peter Sherwood informed members how jewellery has evolved from some of its earliest practical uses (to fasten Roman capes) in 'A History of Diamonds, Gems & Precious Metals - Ancient times to now', while his wife, Miri, whose family has been in the diamond trade for 6 generations, demonstrated select examples of the craft. Members were briefed on aspects such as what to look for in a diamond, and the relative merits of platinum, white gold and silver.

Diary dates - for the next season

30th Sept, 28th Oct, 25th Nov, and 27th Jan



Information

The Dinners with Speakers are normally held on the fourth Monday of the month ; 7.00 for 7.30 finishing by 10pm and are held in The Drawing Room, The Women's University Club, 2 Audley Street, London W1K 1DB.

Pat Shroff

The Thorney Island Society

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Disturbed to see the Duke of York Public House hidden behind contractor's sheeting, Oliver Bradbury investigated the situation. The pub survives but the Kings Arms has gone !!

The Duke of York Public House has Regency origins with surviving external embellishments of later stucco dressings. Sadly within the building due to major works, the interior retains little of its past. It was located on the named Stockbridge Terrace, probably built by 1816; which was later to become the western extension of Victoria Street. In 1825 Thomas Cubitt, developer of the whole block, purchased some ground on and behind the Terrace. Interestingly the Greenwood's Map of London of 1821 shows that the Duke of York Public House was already built.

Although The Kings Arms Public House had been rebuilt in the 1930s, it could be traced back to at least 1834. Located on the corner of Buckingham Palace Road and Allington Street it took its name from when that stretch of Buckingham Palace Road was known as 'King's Row.' The loss of this history is to be regrettable.

Oliver Bradbury

Opportunities for change : Urban Design and development

Strange the way things turn out - something to ponder on as you look around the urban environment.

There was a time and an appreciation when replacement architecture would pay attention to its neighbours when producing the design of the new building. This was something that a Planning Department would take into account in its considerations. Given the recent and growing politicalisation of the Planning law such that the developer is King, and particularly in central Westminster, it seems that this aspect has long gone.

Two contrasting instances come to mind, 67 Tuffton Street and 4 - 16 Artillery Row. Both are replacing office use with residential use. The former retains the existing building while adding a sympathetically designed Mansard floor extension. The conversion into flats is well planned and the result will be a residential improvement to the 'Westminster Village'.

On the other hand consider Artillery Row. The proposals reduce the existing building to its basic structure and adds several floors. The strange part of this is that the original building on Artillery Row was in two ownership's but there was a close design affinity such that the casual glance at the urban design would consider it as being one.

Just why the replacement building has such an extremely different expression, strongly emphasised by the treatment of the first floor, only the designers can explain. Of course there may be an unknown factor that the remaining part may be planned to receive the same treatment, and redeveloped later to match : who knows ?

Another curious situation is on Victoria Street where a single building, having one architectural treatment being designed as a whole, is now being treated as two halves with different architectural elevations. The western half is 55 Victoria Street, and is proposed, as residential. It will have a 'tower' addition on the west end adjoining Strutton Ground.

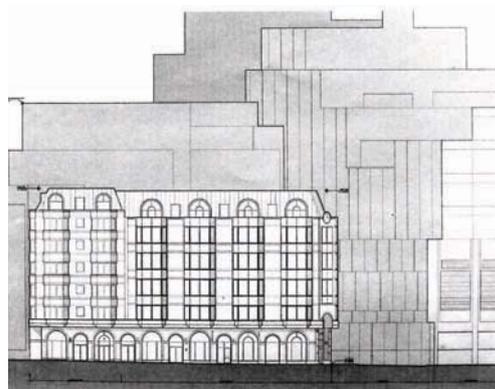
One wonders what one is to think or even how or react to the increasing changes to the local environment and public realm. Is it a matter of 'taste', understanding, education or just aggressive development ?

The Onlooker



The

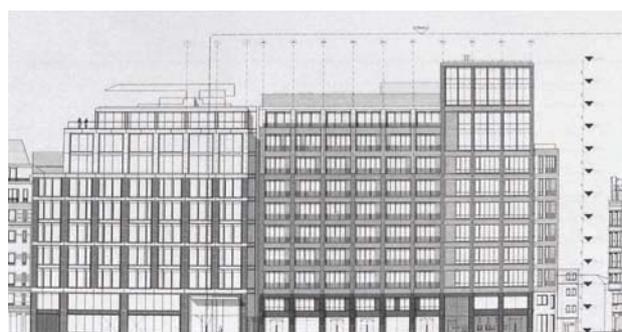
Tufton Street elevation with extra Mansard



Artillery existing elevation as 'one'



Artillery row proposed as 'two'



55 Victoria Street proposals with tower

Opportunities for change

New rules to allow offices to be converted to homes without planning permission will come into force at the end of May, so the Planning Minister has said.

The Government plans are to Change offices (that are empty) into residential use without the necessity of planning permission, that is from Use class B1 (a) offices to C3 residential. This is to come into effect on 30th May.

Simplistically what could be more sensible than to change offices that are empty into residences ? Not so, since there are a number of other factors to take into consideration relating to the community, society and employment. In central Westminster there are an increasing number of buildings which are already being planned and some already being worked on to convert to residential flats. This process does not require any quota of affordable homes to be provided. Some basic 'planning' aspects are appear not to be considered !

The determining factor is the Developer/ Owners profitability. It is highly likely that most of the flats resulting from this will not meaningfully increase the housing stock and more likely to be expensive purchases for investment, with a low occupancy rate ! This is of little or no advantage to the economy of the local area. and non for the housing need.

In the case of the application for Portland House to be so changed, the flats are more than likely to be very expensive judging by the design, space standards and location. While the surroundings are not perhaps as attractive as the Knightsbridge billionaires block it is none the less a very historic location, and some flats will have views of Buckingham Palace and its gardens - which will no doubt be used in the marketing process. In this developer's case, it was stated that it was considered to be more profitable to convert to residential than to upgrade as an office building.

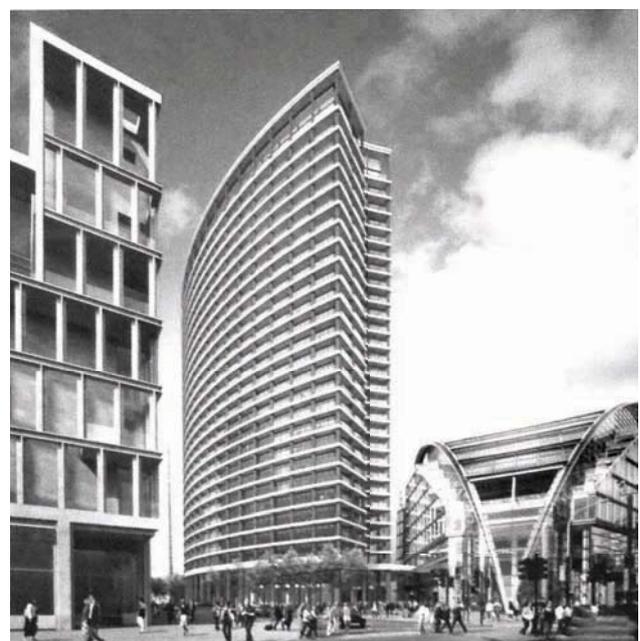
But might there be a loss of office space after the economy has an up turn ? Not in the case of Land Securities since they have four or five new blocks due to start on site in the Victoria Triangle /Circle in the near future - the site being cleared at present. So fate has played into the hands of this developer one might say.

From a broader point of view is there a likelihood of a shortage of office space in central London since so much is being deemed not ot be required now; and if that becomes so in 5 to ten years, what will happen ?

Existing Portland House



Proposed Portland House - much fatter and bigger



THE THORNEY ISLAND SOCIETY

Registered Charity No 1000751

The Society is a voluntary amenity and civic Society which came into being in 1985. It is concerned with the welfare of the physical environment of a widening area, sometimes referred to as the 'Westminster Village'. It organises visits and occasional dinners, reviews planning applications, and maintains a local archive. We welcome support and help on the different aspects of the Society

Become a Member and help with the activities of the Society : the Society NEEDS you

To assist The Society's on going activities we hope to increase the membership further; and to that end existing members are asked to encourage their friends and associates to become members of this unique Society. As a local Amenity Society our interests are in appreciating and conserving the good things of the area and encouraging better. But it is not all work and no play, with Visits, Dinners and the Archive. To join the application form is found on the web site. www.thethorneyislandsociety.org.uk

Anthony Harrow Hon. Membership Secretary

Ongoing work in arranging and cataloguing The Thorney Island Society's 'treasures'

The TTIS Archives is located on Old Pye Street close to the junction with St. Anne's Lane. From the outside it looks a bit like an office, and is in fact a converted shop, standing on the site of the Wun Tun Ragged School - here between 1879 and 1930.

Currently under 'rearrangements', the archives include photographs, art works, drawings and memorabilia ; architectural, historical and archaeological information; and local planning applications with the Society's comments, of which there are many.

Ashley Dickenson

The Annual Open Exhibition of Botanic Artists, Mary Griffiths found exciting.

Held over nine days in April at Central Hall, the exhibition showed 228 works from all over the world; the selection was tough, and the quality very high. The theme this year was 'The Language of Flowers' for example Rosemary for remembrance, Forget-me-not for true love, White Rose for purity and so on. Some connections were unexpected such as potato for benevolence and Italian Fig for argument. Apparently the Horse Chestnut is also known in some areas as the obblyonker. Any other ideas? Recommended for 2014's diary, May 9th to 18th

web site : www.soc-botanical-artists.org

Mary Griffiths

STOP PRESS 02.05.13 "Being French and loving London city (more than Paris) I would like to become a member of your Association. I would like to support your Association, your opinion and your refusal concerning this silly idea to set up a statue of a cock in Trafalgar Square. This place is so beautiful!! " Name withheld - French e-mail (Editor)

Middlesex Guildhall - the building which is now known as the Supreme Court

The former Middlesex Guildhall building is celebrating its 100th anniversary. It was designed by J.S.Gibson and built between 1906 and 1913. on the site of 'Sanctuary Tower'. Since the absorption of the County of Middlesex into Greater London, the quarter sessions of the area were held in the Crown Court until the building was taken over becoming the Supreme Court.

There have been changes to the interior and some of the original features regrettably have been removed. Some say the 'furnishings' would not look out of place in a tourist class hotel ! However there is a permanent exhibition space in the basement for the Supreme Court along with a cafe open to the public. A special exhibition on the first floor will be open in the Summer commemorating the Centenary Harry Bourne

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