

# Senate House Tower — the Capital's First Skyscraper

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*Fine Artist*

This article follows the ideology of the architect Charles Holden through his exploitation of space above and below ground: from his achievement in the design of Senate House Tower, for many years the tallest secular building in London, to his substantial contribution to the London Underground. As a designer, Charles Holden's legacy has become integral to the identity of London. Having become appropriated in film, literature and the visual arts, buildings and interiors designed by Holden have acquired a certain indelible significance. Jane Boyd is an installation artist whose work is often directly born of a specific architectural location such as the Pantheon in Rome and more recently, as this article reveals, Senate House Tower in London.

It was the year 1931; New York had announced the opening of the world's tallest building<sup>1</sup> in Manhattan and construction of the tallest secular building in London, Senate House Tower began. The contract was handed to one man, the architect Charles Holden.<sup>2</sup>

The widening range of skills and professions that the architect was able to draw upon by the 1930s made the roles of the structural and mechanical engineer increasingly important. Indeed, without a way of mechanically transporting people vertically, and safely, through space, above and below ground, the skyscraper and the spread of the London Underground would not have been feasible. What had been long awaited was something that could reliably function as a vertical passenger 'train', so the advent of the electric passenger lift, first built by Werner von Siemens in 1880, was a breakthrough in the development of high-rise building, even though building regulations were slow to catch up. Virtually all Charles Holden's work is concerned with conveying the constant ebb and flow of large numbers of people through space, above and below ground. It is how he achieves this which makes his work particularly special. Later I will return to this point, but first I must explain my particular interest in this architect and my attraction for Senate House.

It was Charles Holden's passionate belief that good architecture resulted from good team work. However, team work depends upon the quality of the delivery by each player. Architecture provides a unique arena for pooling expertise to which the

architect often brings a profound understanding of space and spatial relationships. Where this is successful, the physical encounter of a building can be exhilarating and to be exhilarated by architecture is a particularly baffling experience. Perhaps this is because the sensation occurs as a result of moving through space: there can be no one causal element. It was this notion that initiated 'Concrete Liaisons', a light-based installation at Senate House in 2006.<sup>3</sup> In this work, I brought together three unique buildings, The Pantheon in Rome, the Centres des Nouvelles Industries et Technologies (CNIT) in Paris and Senate House Tower.

The illuminations included my earlier work 'Chancing the Circle', made inside the Pantheon (Figure 1).<sup>4</sup> This building is a simple geometric structure which, in cross-section, plan or elevation, celebrates and plays upon the circle within the square. To stand within the circular interior is to experience a perceptual conundrum, illuminated by a single aperture. However, it is the circular dome of solid concrete, still the largest in the world, and how it was made, which brings this phenomenal construction into the realm of sculpture.

Later, while I was based in Bloomsbury, it was Charles Holden who replaced the Romans in providing my experience of above ground and subterranean vomitoria.<sup>5</sup> As I travelled to and from the University campus, this realisation led to the idea for a work which would result in uniting these three seminal European buildings — the



FIGURE 1 'Chancing the Circle' 1999, a light-based installation by Jane Boyd, The Pantheon, Rome. Photo copyright 1999, Edward Woodman

Pantheon, the CNIT with Senate House Tower — in two light-based projections. It would serve as part of a larger project which explores the boundary between space and place by looking at the extent to which public spaces, which assume new uses, alter the sense of personal identity by the user. The appropriation of an Underground station as an air-raid shelter is a key example. The work, ‘Concrete Liaisons’, took place in December 2006 in an event which ran for 16 consecutive nights, thereby replacing the original floodlighting installed in 1937 (Figures 2 and 3). In addition to ‘Chancing the Circle’ on the Malet Street elevation, the Russell Square elevation featured ‘Landing the Fugitive’, made inside the CNIT Building in Paris (Figure 4).

The significance of the CNIT Building is also found in the roof or dome. Designed in 1958 by the engineer Nicolas Esquilan, it is the largest single span of reinforced concrete — at least in Europe if not the world. The installation observes the interdependence of one example of architecture with another and an ability to predict how light, surface and void unite.

The opening of this event provided an irresistible occasion for the first ever showing of the unedited version of a documentary film called ‘The Building of Senate House’ by J.A. Currie.<sup>6</sup> As well as providing an important record of an historic occasion in the life of the University, this unique footage covers the development of the building and demonstrates the arduous nature of construction methods during 1932–37. It was commissioned by the University and remains a valuable social document in its own right.<sup>7</sup>

Tall buildings and underground stations are designed to accommodate and to promote movement. To oscillate above and below ground is to travel through time



FIGURE 2 ‘Concrete Liaisons’ 2006, light-based installation by Jane Boyd, Senate House London — Malet Street elevation. Photo copyright 2006, Jane Boyd



FIGURE 3 ‘Concrete Liaisons’ 2006 light-based installation by Jane Boyd, Senate House London — Russell Square elevation. Photo copyright 2006 Jane Boyd

in a certain ‘vertical space’ and pursuing this notion in terms of journeying through the ‘vertical train’ and ‘horizontal lift’ of Holden’s perception, one reveals how his legacy, directly and indirectly, touches the lives of millions and comes to understand why it has become embedded in the branding of London. When Holden was appointed sole designer of the new campus of the University of London, he was already acclaimed for many fine institutional and public buildings. Now he was presented with the greatest challenge in his prolific career: the building of Senate House Tower, the first skyscraper in London. Yet tribute for this spectacular achievement should acknowledge the creativity of Charles Holden (Figure 5) and the vision of Sir William Beveridge (Figure 6) who steered the course for the new University campus.<sup>8</sup>

Charles Henry Holden was born in Bolton.<sup>9</sup> In his childhood, he would sustain the sadness of losing his mother and the difficulties of his father’s once prosperous drapery business reduced to bankruptcy. Holden’s first jobs were as a railway store clerk, and as a chemical laboratory assistant. Then, at the age of twenty, his brother-in-law Frederick Green, a land-surveyor, employed Holden to be apprenticed



FIGURE 4 'Landing the Fugitive', 2005, by Jane Boyd, Centre des Nouvelles Industries et Technologies, Paris. Photo copyright 2005, Jane Boyd

to E.W. Leeson, a Manchester architect whose work Holden described as 'competent'.<sup>10</sup> Holden also studied at Manchester School of Art and around 1896, his particular grasp of modernist architectural form began to emerge in designs he submitted to the Building News Designing Club, using the pseudonym 'The Owl'. At the age of 27 soon after he became a partner at his Knightsbridge-based practice Adams Holden & Pearson, Holden won his first major commission, the design of Bristol Central Library and, subsequently, the design of the British Medical Association in the Strand, London.

William Henry Beveridge was born in Rangpur, Bengal, where his father was a judge in the Indian Civil Service.<sup>11</sup> Beveridge's remarkable career as an economist and social reformer started at Balliol College, Oxford. Having gained a first class honours degree in 1902, he rejected the notion of becoming a lawyer, and took a first job in journalism as leader writer on the *Morning Post* in 1905. Subsequently, he joined the Civil Service and by 1919 had risen through the ranks to become Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of Food. That same year, he took up the position of Director of the



FIGURE 5 Portrait photograph of the architect Charles Holden (b. Bolton 1875, d. 1960) by an unknown photographer, 1925–1945. Charles Holden Photographic Collection at the London Transport Museum. Image no: 17712, Inventory no: 1998/24727



FIGURE 6 William Beveridge (b. Rangpur 1879, d. Oxfordshire 1963), 1943. Photograph courtesy of Imperial War Museum, London, negative no. D17134

London School of Economics (LSE) where he remained until 1937. He was Vice Chancellor of the University of London from 1926 to 1928, a period when key decisions would bring about developments for a new centralised University of London and plans which would alter the London cityscape forever.

By the early 1920s, the University of London had expanded rapidly and urgently needed new premises. It has been suggested that Beveridge's vision for a new University campus, right in the heart of the capital, was prompted by his frustration with London taxi drivers who rarely seemed to know how to find the University and, ultimately, his indignation when one identified it as the place next door to the Royal School of Needlework! Obviously, the country's second largest university, the first to offer women BA degrees, urgently needed to do something about its lack of identity.

The site for the new campus was identified in Bloomsbury and protracted negotiations towards its purchase ensued. Yet a delay for Beveridge in the realisation of his plans was a window of opportunity for Holden since, during this time, he would win and complete three major new buildings in the West End: the headquarters of the British Medical Association near the Strand, the headquarters of the London Electric Railway Company at St James's and the new subterranean booking hall of Piccadilly Circus Underground Station. I will now return to Holden's approach to design and the nature of his intentions for each contract.

Aesthetically, these buildings are particularly interesting since they serve to demonstrate Charles Holden's transition from Art-Deco through Arts and Crafts to his particular Modernist lexicon which he expressed in terms of 'the plan, and the planes and the masses arising out of the plan' balanced by minute attention to detail. His buildings are consistently bulky and sculptural yet surprisingly refined.

The relationship between interior and exterior detailing in early 20th century urban architecture enters new territory when Holden uses light to pull the exterior detail inside the building, giving it an active part to play in the physical experience of the interior (Figure 7). Furthermore, in commissioning major works from a team of artists and craftsmen and women, Holden took more risks than many architects of his time in pushing the definition of architecture.

Indeed, Holden gave the American-born artist Jacob Epstein (1880–1959) his first major commission to produce no less than 18 figures to be placed at second floor level around the former British Medical Association (Figure 8). These sculptures, larger than life-size figures of the male nude, scandalised Edwardian London.

The facades of 55 Broadway feature two stone carvings, 'Day' and 'Night' by Jacob Epstein (Figure 9), and the 'Four Winds', eight large bas-reliefs by artists including Eric Gill, Henry Moore and A.H. Gerrard. The bas-reliefs revel in the dirt and weathering as their contours become increasingly accentuated, here lighter, there darker. 'Please don't clean me', they plead. The technical skill and artistic judgement of these artists contribute seamlessly to the integrity of this building. Instead of gargoyles, the downpipe connectors are garnished with the first version of The Roundel, the emergent logo for London Transport above and below ground. The building, cruciform in design, includes three entrances to St James's Park Underground Station. Its Portland Stone cladding would be inspirational to the client's brief for the design of Senate House. The practice Adams Holden and Pearson received the



FIGURE 7 Grilles, lettering, lighting within the Cloisters at Senate House. Photo copyright 2005 Jane Boyd



FIGURE 8 Zimbabwe House constructed 1906–8 — formerly the headquarters of the British Medical Association. Photo copyright 2005, Jane Boyd

1929 London Architecture Medal and Diploma for 55 Broadway. At the presentation in 1931, Holden spoke of the spirit of his work in the following terms:

an architecture telling of joy in plain structure and material; joy, too, in all the humble and even mechanical activities which make up architecture today . . . I believe that that is the thought underlying the birth of what is called 'Modernism' today. It must be



FIGURE 9 55 Broadway constructed 1927–29 — formerly headquarters of the London Electric Railway Company, now headquarters of London Transport. This façade features a bas-relief carving ‘Day’ by Jacob Epstein. Photo copyright 2007, Jane Boyd

remembered that it was the modernist of the past who was the maker of traditions which some would have us follow exclusively today. We, too, have our part to play in the making of traditions; but let us see to it that these grow naturally out of the adjustment of our ideas to the changing conditions of life and changing methods of construction. Only so shall we keep our architecture sane and free from the element of ephemeral fashion.<sup>12</sup>

Once the tallest building in London, a towering presence in a parade of two-storey housing, 55 Broadway was for some years the headquarters of MI6. Today it is a diminutive architectural punctuation surrounded by multi-storey office blocks and home to the headquarters of London Transport. The exceptional design of the building for London Electric Railway Company was not lost on its then new Managing Director, Frank Pick (1878–1941) either. He, like Charles Holden, believed in the concept of teamwork to produce effective, sustainable results. This immediate compatibility between the two men would establish a working relationship, the fruits of which would become enshrined in the image and identity of London.

At this point in his progress towards the realisation of Senate House Tower, it is useful to give focus to Charles Holden, pre-eminent designer of (a considerable number of) Underground stations.

At the turn of the 20th century, the growth of London's population had forced the expansion of the Underground network in order that the commuting masses could be successfully extruded to leafy areas evoked by names such as Wood Green. The Great Northern, Piccadilly & Brompton Railway (8.5 miles long) opened 15 December 1906. It was for this, the second line of the network, that Holden was commissioned by Pick to re-design the circular booking hall (Figure 10), just a year after he had built the Bakerloo intersection there.

Symbols of an all powerful empire would be strategically placed in this new station situated at the heart of London. Oil paintings depicting a large map of the world were sited on the ceiling at the top of the up-escalators. In the circular ticket hall, a world clock map entitled 'The World Time Today' was installed and remains in situ. A commemorative stone placed at the top of the Piccadilly Line escalator records the opening of this major extension by the Mayor of London in 1928. The station received international acclaim and inspired the design of the Moscow metro in the early 1930s. By this stage, Holden's status as architect and that of Adams Holden & Pearson had grown rapidly and, because it is fundamental to understanding the design of Senate House, I shall return to the Holden/Pick collaboration later.

In spite of his exceptional achievements with 55 Broadway and at Piccadilly Circus, Charles Holden's appointment to design the new campus for the University of London was by no means inevitable as H.V. Lanchester, Consultant Architect to the Clerk of the Court, indicates when he describes him as 'rather rigid and dogmatic' and subsequently places him 13th out of 14 on the long short-list. The list included:



FIGURE 10 Piccadilly Circus — subterranean circular booking hall and subways 1925–1928. Photograph from the Photographic Collection at the London Transport Museum. Image no: P9062; Inventory no. 1998/879 June 1929. Copyright Transport for London

Arnold Dunbar-Smith (1866–1933), Percy S. Worthington, Giles Gilbert Scott (1880–1960).<sup>13</sup> The four short-listed candidates were rotated in turn through a black-tie dinner at the Athenaeum Club and Holden’s dinner took place on 25 March 1931. Of the candidates the 52-year-old Giles Gilbert Scott who, by that time, had been awarded contracts for Liverpool Cathedral, Battersea Power Station and Bankside Power Station (now home to Tate Modern), had become the favourite to win the contract. Despite Lanchester’s reservations however, Beveridge, who had originally nominated Charles Holden as a contender, awarded him the job! His appointment of ‘architect for the Bloomsbury site’ was duly agreed in writing four months later on 31 July.<sup>14</sup>

William Beveridge was responsible for raising funds for the purchase of the 11.5 acre Bloomsbury site from the Government which under David Lloyd George had acquired the land from the estate of the Duke of Bedford in 1920. A conflict occurred in the planning and layout of the site which would not be resolved until 1927 when, at last, the acquisition of the land went ahead for £525,000 — a sum largely provided by the recently established Rockefeller Foundation.

William Beveridge said in the House of Lords at the time

The paying out of this quarter has to be regarded rather as one of the greatest opportunities for architectural design in London since the old Houses of Parliament were burnt down nearly a hundred years ago. The architect who designs the University will necessarily pay regard to the buildings of the British Museum.<sup>15</sup>

The preparation of the 30,000 sq. ft site for building would require the felling of trees, the widening of Malet Street, and the demolition of virtually all the Georgian houses in Torrington Square (Figure 11). Notably nos. 25/26 became Holden’s drawing office in 1937 and are two of the few remaining houses in the Square today. Work started on 29 December 1932 and the foundation stone was laid on 6 June 1933.

In his original plans for the University, Holden states that the university group would ‘appear with quiet insistence while the view from Tottenham Court Road main entrance would be very impressive’. However, changes to the original scheme would be necessary for the following reasons: (a) to accommodate an expected increase in the need for space by up to 20 per cent; (b) to retain Torrington Square as the University Garden; and (c) to provide a vista between Byng Place and the Tower (Figure 12). The Vice-Chancellor, Gregory Foster, advised the London County Council (LCC) in 1928 that, ‘The object of the University is to establish a group of beautiful buildings around a green space, which the public should have reasonable opportunity of seeing and visiting subject to the over-riding claims of the work of the University’.<sup>16</sup> Consequently, the Tower hovers over the Cloisters which connect the North and South Blocks allowing for an unobstructed public right of way, east and west, between Malet Street and Russell Square. For his part, Holden clearly acknowledged the requirement that the design ‘... should be clear cut but not harsh, dignified but not ponderous; graceful but not florid’.<sup>17</sup>

The legal restrictions on the height of secular buildings had remained unaltered in England since 1894 when the maximum height was 80 ft excluding two storeys in a roof and ornamental towers and turrets. By 1921, there was urgent need for change yet the London Building Act of 1930 merely repeated the requirements of the previous Act including height restrictions. The application to the LCC to build to 210 ft for

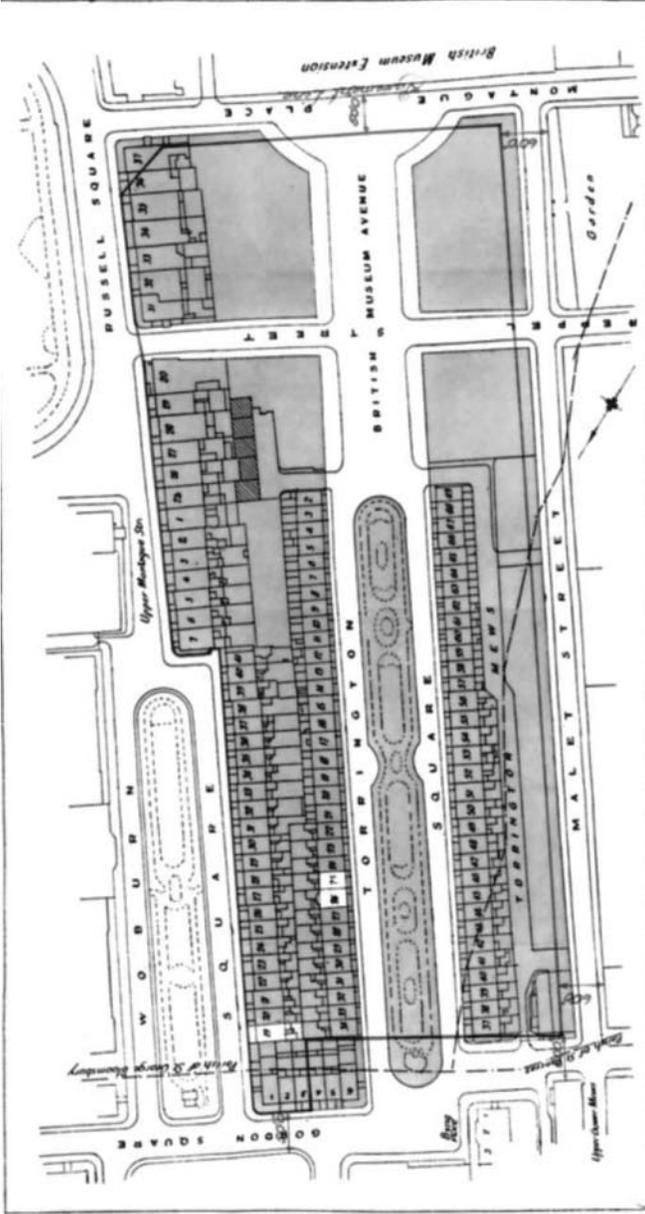


FIGURE 11 Torrington Square showing demolition zone. Senate House archives CT/32/583

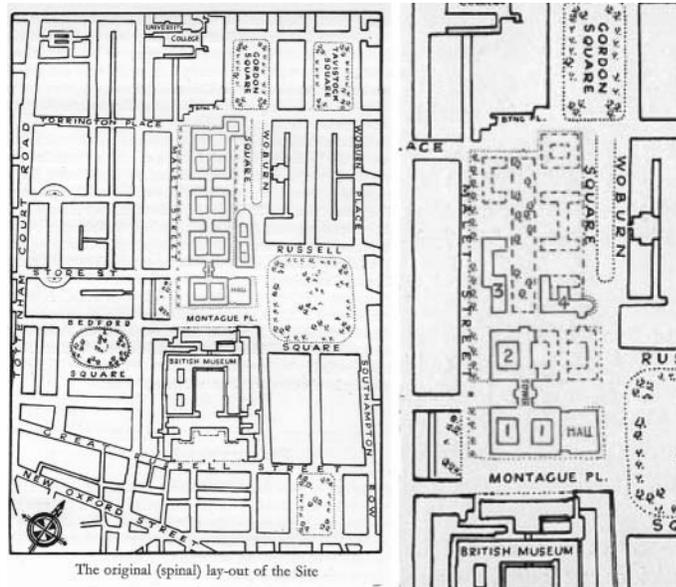


FIGURE 12 *left* Original concept for the University of London plan of the site; *right* the agreed compromise — the ‘Balanced Scheme’ — in plan (detail). University of London, *The Senate House and Library* (1938) 17–19. The author has made all reasonable effort to locate the copyright holder(s) of these sketches

Senate House was approved largely because the Tower was sited at least 150 ft from the site boundary in any direction.

The costs were initially estimated at £1,410,000 of which £310,000 was set aside for the construction of the Library and Tower.<sup>18</sup> The vision and spirit of the commission was clearly driven by Beveridge yet it would be 11 years before he would see Holden give form to his ideas in his first drawings and embark upon what he, at the age of 57, privately described as his ‘life sentence’.<sup>19</sup> During that time, a number of the distinguishing design features had already been proposed by Lanchester and the Court. In fact, it was the Clerk of the Court, Mr Claughton who, arguably inspired by Holden’s most recent achievement with 55 Broadway, first proposed the idea of a ‘telescopic tower’<sup>20</sup> and Mr Lanchester who advised the Court that ‘the Library should be a lofty room structure well-lighted and possessing dignified architectural features . . . the facades should be executed in Portland Stone’.

It was intended that the building last at least 200 years. For this reason where reinforced concrete was employed, it was always used within an un-reinforced concrete environment. For example, the lower floors of the building are founded on reinforced concrete piles but the pile caps and retaining walls around the basement are of un-reinforced concrete. The Tower itself is a steel beamed structure supported by a thick bed of un-reinforced concrete (Figure 13). The exterior of the building is Cornish granite to the first floor and from this level; the entire building is clad in Portland stone.

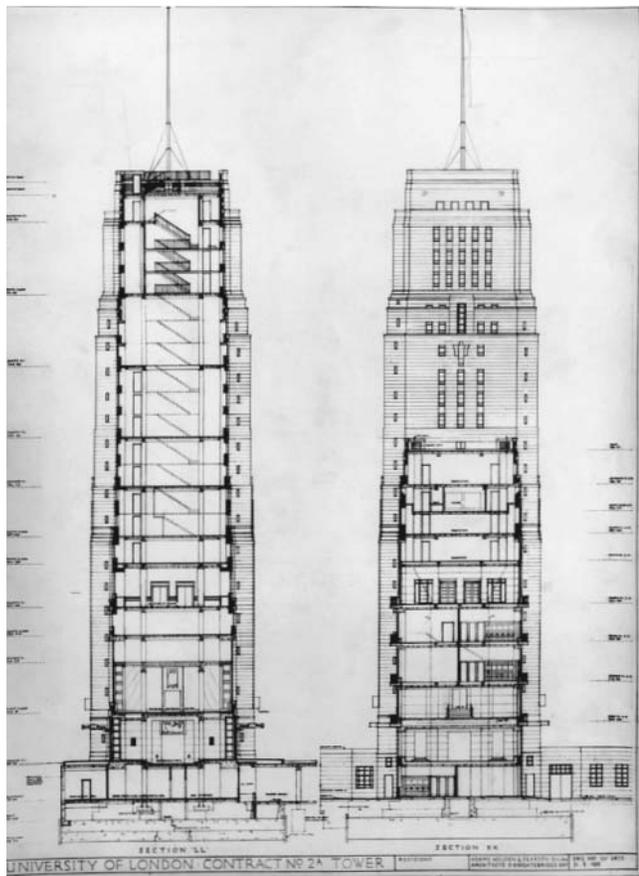


FIGURE 13 Senate House Tower in section. Section drawing 13 May 1935 by Adams Holden & Pearson; RIBA Drawings Collection at the Victoria & Albert Museum London

The spring of 1936 saw the ominous reoccupation of the Rhineland by Nazi Germany. Virtually until the day war was declared, construction work continued. Then, no sooner had the completion of the 210 ft tower taken place, than the Ministry of Information requisitioned the building. The previous year, Beveridge had left the LSE to become Master of University College, Oxford, never to see the University of London become first occupant of the tallest secular building in London (Figure 14).

Whatever the contract, Holden's approach was inclusive — from the bold modernist three-dimensional concept to the detailing of lettering, door-furniture and lighting. The result was functional and highly observant of the needs of the individual user. He created the indoor thoroughfare, effectively the grand entrance to the top storey from the subterranean street. Moreover, his designs were especially sensitive to the demands of continuous human movement *en masse*. In order to express how this approach affected the image of London, I must return to the alliance between Charles Holden and Frank Pick.



FIGURE 14 Senate House, University of London, begun 1932, abandoned 1938. View from Keppel Street. Photo copyright 2005, Jane Boyd

By the time construction work on the Bloomsbury site began, the Holden–Pick exploration of design and communications was fast becoming expressed in an increasing number of new Underground stations, especially on the Piccadilly line. Their intention was to establish the blueprint for the Underground railway system and this would become Charles Holden’s major contribution to the branding of the Underground network (Figures 15 and 16).

In addition to the right design team, the rapid development of the London Underground demanded huge investment and ultimately this was secured by American, French and Dutch bonds. London’s public transport system, largely funded by private enterprise, succeeded in extending the perceived boundaries of London and by 1934 had attracted 416 million passengers.<sup>21</sup>

In 1930, Holden and Pick made several trips to investigate design and communication systems in The Netherlands, Germany, Denmark and Sweden in order that the fresh image for London transport networks both above and below ground should be



FIGURE 15 Chiswick Park Station opened 1932. Photo copyright 2005, Jane Boyd



FIGURE 16 Turnpike Lane Station opened 1932 — stairwell. Photo copyright 2005, Jane Boyd

entirely cohesive.<sup>22</sup> Previously, Holden had had the opportunity to gather information on high-rise developments in the USA, especially in Chicago.<sup>23</sup> Yet in contextualising the nature of Charles Holden's new work, commentators most frequently cite the Dutch architect Willem Marinus Dudok (1884–1974) and his design for the new council offices in Hilversum (Figure 17).

The plans for this building were first presented in 1924 and immediately rejected by a council embroiled in political and economic difficulties. Undeterred, Dudok resubmitted the plans, this time with the weight of a recommendation by H.P. Berlage which was signed by 55 of his peers. Largely due to this intervention, work was allowed to begin in 1927.<sup>24</sup> It should be noted that, in his plans for this and many other local authority buildings in this suburban location, Dudok was dependent on the enhancement of his work by the landscape architect, Jan Hendrik Meijer (1886–1953). It was he who designed the large water feature which forces the viewer away from the building, encouraging one to see it as a whole structure balanced by its reflection. Dudok's work frequently references H.P. Berlage, and De Stijl, yet uses of vibrant colour in a range of materials from mortar to mosaic belie Dudok's council building as clinical modernism and result in a scheme that, close up, has a certain lack of unity while the aesthetic value of the tower outweighs its purpose. These points resist the notion that Holden was directly influenced by Willem Dudok although Frank Pick himself reported, 'you see an asymmetrical building, but it is one which, by simple repetition of details, builds up a structure of considerable beauty because of its rhythm'.<sup>25</sup> Holden was involved in the much broader concerns of an architectural dialogue which was taking place in response to socio-political change across Europe in the 1920–30s.



FIGURE 17 Het Raadhuis, The Local Council offices in Hilversum, The Netherlands, viewed from the west, designed by Willem Marinus Dudok 1927–1931. Photo copyright 2007, Jane Boyd

The austere exterior of Senate House, which Niklaus Pevsner describes as an example of ‘undecided modernism’, gives little indication of the intimacy and detailing of the interior of the building for which Holden appropriates many of the features found in his Underground ticket halls.

In keeping with Holden’s mission to produce functional architecture, the window knows its place: it is a hole in the wall through which light can travel effectively. Indeed, the edifice of Senate House is a systematic puncturing of a flat surface! Yet it is how the hole is crafted, recessed and detailed which brings elegance to the overall harmony of his work. For example, depicted in the grilles for the windows at first floor level is the use of the design for the grand plan for the University which is repeated as a linear detail abutting the stone of the actual building (Figure 18).

Charles Holden’s brief from the Court, coupled with the onerous building regulations of the time, did not compromise his unrelenting desire to employ over 30 artists and craftsmen in bringing unity to the design overall — inside and out.

The Private Dining Room alone includes works commissioned by Holden from a total of four artists (Figure 19).

However, there was one battle he evidently did lose and that concerned the installation of sculpture (Figure 20). He had reason to write, ‘Perhaps when Mr. Coates comes to know me a little better he will realise that with me sculpture is not mere decoration but the bone and sinew of good architecture’.<sup>26</sup>

New technologies are quickly assimilated into, and expressed in and by, the arts. The electric passenger lift gave us the skyscraper and as a consequence, photography and, later, film-making within the urban context underwent a renaissance and film-makers René Clair and Alfred Hitchcock were surely among the first to exploit unfamiliar breathtaking perspectives.<sup>27</sup> Since its construction, Senate House has been developing its own peculiar narrative which began with its use as the headquarters for the Ministry of Information during WW2 and, subsequently, the Ministry of



FIGURE 18 Senate House, Malet Street elevation — window detailing. Photo copyright 2005, Jane Boyd



FIGURE 19 Senate House, The Private Dining Room, 1938. University of London, *The Senate House and Library* (1938), 68. Photograph M.O. Dell and H.L. Wainwright. Dell and Wainwright worked as architectural photographers for the *Architects' Journal* and the *Architectural Review* during the 1930s. The author has made all reasonable effort to identify the copyright holder(s) of this photograph



FIGURE 20 Senate House, empty plinth on north elevation. Photo copyright 2005, Jane Boyd



FIGURE 21 Senate House, stairwell to rooms — South Block. Photo copyright 2005, Jane Boyd

Truth in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by George Orwell.<sup>28</sup> Even without the dubious caché of a chummy nickname, the building's sober exterior and finely detailed interior (Figure 21) are continually appropriated in film,<sup>29</sup> literature and the visual arts<sup>30</sup> and thus it becomes embedded in the public consciousness. Yet today, who can place Senate House Tower; who can name its architect?

While he received awards for his work, including the RIBA's highest accolade, the Royal Gold Medal for Architecture in 1936, Holden asserted that good architecture depended upon good teamwork. For this reason, he refused to take total credit for designs attributed to him and twice refused a knighthood. For all that this man from Bolton, Lancashire, has contributed to the identity of London, he remains virtually unknown, yet, through his buildings, he asserts himself with quiet insistence.

## Acknowledgement

This article is based on a paper first presented at 'Tall Buildings in the London Landscape an Historical and Contemporary Symposium' by Jane Boyd at the Centre for Metropolitan History Historical at the University of London in October 2007.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The Empire State Building 1929–1931 is 449 m high and was designed by Shreve, Lamb and Harmon. It is currently the tallest building in New York.
- <sup>2</sup> The contract was signed by Charles Holden not Adams Holden and Pearson, his architectural practice.
- <sup>3</sup> ‘Concrete Liaisons’ 2006, a light-based installation by Jane Boyd at Senate House; collection the artist. See [www.janeboyd.co.uk](http://www.janeboyd.co.uk)
- <sup>4</sup> ‘Chancing the Circle’ 1999, a light-based installation by Jane Boyd, the Pantheon Rome; collection the artist.
- <sup>5</sup> I was appointed Leverhulme Trust Artist-in-Residence 2000 at the Warburg Institute.
- <sup>6</sup> No information on or further films by J.A. Currie have been located by the author at the time of writing.
- <sup>7</sup> See Senate House archives ref CT 3/9/1-3.
- <sup>8</sup> J. Harris, *William Beveridge: A Biography* (1997), 262–4.
- <sup>9</sup> For the first comprehensive biography of Charles Holden, see E. Karol, *Charles Holden: Architect* (Spalding, 2007).
- <sup>10</sup> In 1885, Holden’s elder sister Emma married David Frederick Green. He had an established architects’ and surveyors’ practice in Bolton where Holden worked in 1891. For further reading, see Karol, *Charles Holden*, 23–56.
- <sup>11</sup> For an excellent account of William Beveridge’s life and work which draws upon archival material located at the British Library of Political Science, see Harris, *William Beveridge*.
- <sup>12</sup> Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) London Architectural Medal and Diploma 1929, *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects*, xxxviii (24 Jan 1931), 167–72. For further reading on 55 Broadway, see T. Ruddock, ‘Charles Holden and the Issue of High Buildings in London 1927–47’, *Construction History*, 12 (1996), 83–7.
- <sup>13</sup> See Senate House archives CF1/31/583.
- <sup>14</sup> J. Roger Preston was appointed consultant engineer and R. Travers Morgan, structural engineer.
- <sup>15</sup> House of Lords session 1928.
- <sup>16</sup> See Senate House archives ref CF1/28/707.
- <sup>17</sup> See Senate House archives ref CF1/28/707.
- <sup>18</sup> See Senate House archives ref CF1/30/583.
- <sup>19</sup> Ruddock, ‘Charles Holden’.
- <sup>20</sup> See letter dated 24 Jun 1932 in the Senate House archives ref CT1/32/583.
- <sup>21</sup> For further reading, see C. Wolmar, *The Subterranean Railway* (2004).
- <sup>22</sup> During 20 June to 7 July 1930, Charles Holden and Frank Pick spent two days visiting Amsterdam, Bussum, The Hague Scheveningen and Hilversum and three days visiting Dusseldorf, Cologne and Hamburg. For further reading, see Karol, *Charles Holden*, 340–8.
- <sup>23</sup> In April 1913, Holden travelled to North America as part of his study of ‘Modern Architecture Abroad’ for which he won the ‘RIBA. Godwin Medal’. See Karol, *Charles Holden*, 196–7.
- <sup>24</sup> E. van der Kleij, *Architectuur en Stedebouw in Noord-Holland 1850-1940 nr 10 Noord Holland Monumenten Inventarisatie Project* (Zwolle, 1993).
- <sup>25</sup> *Architectural Association Journal* (February 1933), 257.
- <sup>26</sup> Senate House archives ref CT1/32/583.
- <sup>27</sup> See R. Clair, ‘Paris qui Dort’ (1925) and A. Hitchcock, ‘Blackmail’ (1929).
- <sup>28</sup> G. Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), 5–6.
- <sup>29</sup> For example R. Michell dir., ‘Enduring Love’, Pathe Pictures International, 2004.
- <sup>30</sup> See J. Holzer, ‘For London’ 2006, part of the Beckett Centenary Festival at the Barbican London.

## Notes for Contributor

Jane Boyd is a British artist based in London and Amsterdam working in light-based installation. For further information, see [www.janeboyd.co.uk](http://www.janeboyd.co.uk)