

## **New Cavendish Street Building History**

In 1960 the London County Council announced a plan to turn the Regent Street Polytechnic into a federal college by adding a new College of Architecture and Advanced Building Technology and also a College of Engineering and Science. CAABT was allocated the Luxborough Lodge Site in Marylebone Road (see separate guide) and CES the site in New Cavendish Street. The architect for New Cavendish Street was the firm of Lyons, Israel and Ellis, appointed in 1962.

The schemes for both new colleges were much delayed (delays in releasing capital, legal and planning difficulties etc) but were finally finished in 1970. The work was going on against the background of post-Robbins reorganisation and the creation of the binary line between Universities and Polytechnics. 30 new polytechnics were established in 1970 as part of what was described as the public sector of higher education, awarding degrees from the Council for National Academic Awards. Under this legislation, Regent Street Polytechnic had been re-designated and had changed its name to the Polytechnic of Central London (PCL) as part of its expansion into a multi-site institution.

The two new buildings were officially opened by Lord Hailsham on 21 May 1971 in a ceremony that also included the official designation of the new Polytechnic of Central London. The teaching of Chemistry and Biology (now Life Sciences), Electrical and Electronic Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Mathematics and Physics and Photographic Technology moved to the New Cavendish Street building, which also housed a new computer centre, from Summer 1971. The binary line was abolished in 1992 and PCL became the University of Westminster.

## **The design of the building**

The site of the new College of Engineering and Science occupies 1.34 acres at the corner of Clipstone Street and Cleveland Street. Lyons, Israel, Ellis Partnership had to work within quite strict planning requirements. To conform to daylight requirements, the college was subject to a height restriction (because of the Middlesex hospital on the south side). The architects were also asked to provide underground car parking and to allow for the retention or rebuilding of the public house on the site to overcome the payment of compensation to the brewers.

The resulting building has no absolute physical divisions but is organised into four areas of function: a cranked seven storey laboratory block along Cleveland Street; a stepped five-storey tutorial block along New Cavendish Street; between them a circulation fulcrum which works vertically and horizontally, and, interlocking and interrelating, two lecture theatres; and fourth, a podium covering the heavy engineering labs and the car park.

### **Praise from architecture critics**

Patrick Nuttgens said “The result is powerful, idiosyncratic, angular, uncompromising and intense. The only pieces of the site unused, vertically and horizontally, are those sterilised by the byelaws. Otherwise the college rises sheerly from what seem narrow streets and a couple of themes are developed into a rich orchestration of architectural noises – the white concrete towers of circulation and splayed shapes of specialised rooms on the one hand and curtains of bronze framing on the other” [*The Architectural Review*, CXLIX No. 887, January 1971]

Progressive Architecture described it as a “Spectacular solution for restricted site....“That these criteria could have been met at all on this site is no small triumph for the architects’ sense of planning and design; that they were carried out without foisting a monstrosity on the city is a feat. But that they were done with such brilliance that the building has become a widely admired piece of architecture in London is proof that many kinds of building restrictions, if exploited in a positive manner, can be made to work to the advantage of good design.” [*Progressive Architecture*, April 1972]

While Alistair Best commented that “The library, plain, spacious and charmingly lit is laid out on two floors; the students find it a joy to work in and are unlikely to carp at the disproportionately large reading tables provided by the Inner LEA....“Ellis’ triumph has been to achieve an appearance of costliness at reasonable cost; to be generous with space on a pocket handkerchief site; to provide a hard coherent plan which never thrusts itself into the foreground.” [*Design*, No. 268, April 1971]

### **Redevelopment since 1970**

The New Cavendish Street building was refurbished between 2001 and 2006, in two stages. Both stages were overseen by Maud Tyler (the Deputy Vice Chancellor) and a Project Director. The refurbishment saw the completion of the new Copland building (named after Geoffrey Copland, Vice Chancellor of the University of Westminster 1996-2007). This created a new Hub, with a foyer and refectory space in the centre of the building. The redevelopment was formally opened by Alan Johnson, Secretary of State for Education and Skills on 8 November 2006.

## **Relevant sources available in the University of Westminster Archives**

### Opening Ceremony and Designation

The Opening Ceremony for New Cavendish Street was held on the same day as our Marylebone Road premises and concurrently with the ceremony for our designation as the Polytechnic of Central London. The programme for these events includes a number of photographs and a history of the site.

### Photographs

The University Archives holds photographs of the interior and exterior of the New Cavendish Street site, mostly in black and white, as well as photographs of the opening ceremony (see above).

### Architectural Plans

The University Archive holds copies of the floor plan produced by the Architects in 1965, with revisions in 1970.

### Presscuttings

There are numerous mentions of the New Cavendish Street site in the Polytechnic's student magazines, both prior to its construction and afterwards. The Archive also holds a copy of The Architectural Review, Vol CXLIX no. 887 (1971) which features articles on both our Marylebone Road and New Cavendish Street premises.

### Administrative papers

Mentions of the new building are made in the Board of Governors' minutes and there are also Estate committee minutes discussing the building before and after its completion, including later adaptations. Music events were often held in the bar at New Cavendish Street and the University Archive holds the licences for this and the other University premises.

### Redevelopment

The Archive holds plans, design briefing, costing and meeting minutes relating to the new Copland building, as well as photographs of the opening.