

CROSBY HALL AND ITS RE-ERECTION

By *W. Emil Godfrey*

This was the Anniversary Address delivered by Mr. Godfrey at Crosby Hall in 1976. The text is printed as it was given.

The story of Crosby Place in Bishopsgate up to its eventual removal in 1909 to this site in Chelsea is well known. The history of its building in 1466 and of its occupiers afterwards was described by C.W.F. Goss in the book which he wrote in 1908 and its history and particularly the description of its architecture and the authenticity of its remaining features was analysed fully in the Survey of London monograph, which was published only a few months later. The second volume of the Survey's series on Chelsea and the book *Some Famous Buildings and their Story* by Alfred Clapham and my father, both published in 1913, describe the amount of original work which this building now contains and its architectural significance. Since then it has all been summarised in a most readable and scholarly article by Hilda Reid in the Annual Report of the Chelsea Society for 1955 and subsequently produced as a booklet by Crosby Hall.

I say this story is well known. This means of course to those who have read it. There may be some who have not, and at some risk I shall repeat it in outline. But that is not why I have been asked to come here today. Nor is it because I can speak from experience, because it was not till two years after its removal here that I was born. It is because I am the son of the architect, antiquary and author, Walter H. Godfrey, who was responsible for the re-erection of the building and I therefore possess some of the records and will have heard some of the anecdotes of the event. To that extent you may hear something new from me.

You are now sitting in a building far removed from its original site; and, though it is orientated as it was in the City and the sunlight is streaming through the same windows as it would have done five hundred years ago, you may be experiencing some unease at the thought. I should at the outset therefore try to allay that feeling. I shall say a word later about the great efforts which were made to save it on its original site at the time; the conscience of the conservationist therefore should not be concerned on that score. The real argument against removing buildings is the fear that people will make light of their demolition if the attitude is adopted that they, or worse still parts of them, can be saved by removal elsewhere. The aim should always be to find a use for them where they are. But once demolition has become inevitable, it would be puritanical not to keep for instance such a ceiling as the one which hangs above you here and to have deprived you of half an hour's enforced enjoyment of it.

If I were showing people an old house I would normally start by recalling the early history of the site and the people associated with it, but as it has flown right away from its site and in fact

settled in the garden of the house which Thomas More built for himself in Chelsea village, which is quite a different story, I will go straight to the building itself.

In 1466 Sir John Crosby bought the lease of land in Bishopsgate which adjoined St. Helen's Priory, the convent of Benedictine nuns there. He was a wool merchant and a prominent member of the Grocers' Company, later to be knighted by Edward IV and to be Mayor of the Staple of Calais. He was employed at times, as merchant princes were, on missions abroad and would expect to live in surroundings fit to receive them too. Such was the stately house which he put up on his newly acquired site. His new work may well have been an extension to the merchant Pinelli's house already there and of which he was tenant. The whole came to be called Crosby Place, but Palace would have been the princely and more appropriate name. "Very large and beautiful and the highest at that time in London" was Stow's description of it.

Great houses in the fifteenth century would be built around a number of courtyards—a progress from outer to inner courts was to be expected, but in the restriction of a city site the first court was likely to be the important one and this is the one which we are concerned with here. Most of London's houses were built of timber, but Crosby's new work was in stone. He left the houses on the east side of Bishopsgate standing and the entrance to the courtyard was made by archway through them. On the east side opposite stood the new hall, its main entrance door and entry to the screens passage on the right and oriel on the left. On the north side was a two storeyed wing, with a corresponding full height bay, which contained the great parlour and great chamber over, both having elaborate stone detail matching that of the hall and fine carved ceilings of gilded oak and stucco work. At the east end of the parlour, close to the door into the hall, was a little external door, tucked almost out of sight behind the hall's oriel, not inaptly called a postern for informal access to the courtyard. To the north of the junction of hall and parlour was set a large square staircase, which other chambers adjoined.

For the existence of all this there was good evidence; for the nature of the building which formed the south side of the courtyard there was less. It is probable, however, that the chapel was situated there. A succession of other buildings, lodgings and kitchen court will have lain behind to the south and away to the east.

Although it had all the traditional features, the dais end with its oriel and way out to the more private apartments, the luxury of a wall fireplace as well as the opening in the roof for the louvre over a central hearth, the main entrance into a screens passage and presumably the service wings beyond, one cannot imagine

this hall as one where the lord was wont to dine amongst the members of all ranks of his household. It was a ceremonial place of reception and great assembly and banquet. To the moral historian it may have been seen to mark the beginning of the end therefore of that great medieval social organisation which such recognition of everyman's place in it exemplified. It is doubtful whether this was ever quite so organic or so obvious in merchant circles as it was in feudal, however. Anyway, with the dissolution of the monasteries still a comfortable seventy years away there was no sign of that decadence in its architecture, which people see in the perpendicular style when they compare it with the adventurous and pure design of the true Gothic period and draw attention to the proliferation of ornament masking inadequate form and workmanship.

The size of this hall amounts to two squares on plan, but its space is a little over the double cube, for the dimension of its breadth reaches only just above the springing line of the windows. It possesses one of the most consummately beautiful ceilings in existence. One begins to say "ceiling", because gone are the structural members seen to be doing their work and people are beginning almost to be conditioned to receive the Renaissance of classical ideas. (Yet in the hall of Eltham Palace, whose windows resemble strikingly those of this hall and which was built some ten years later, the structural members—very much elaborated—reappear to view.) My father used often to point out that the architects of that time ceased to let their arches rise free and their design to flow, but imprisoned them in rectangles (as the Romans did) and, except for the oriel, this is what has been done here. There is no lack of flow however in the way this carpenter's arches drop to his glorious pendants. They remind us of the contemporary masons' hanging their bosses, the structural crown of their archwork, daringly downwards in the fan vaulting of rooms like the Divinity School at Oxford. We have in the ceiling a series of divisions and diminishing subdivisions exquisitely ornamented which need no description since they are present with you. There was no skimping of material or lack of forethought in piecing the design together. Though, as in Eltham, great spikes were used in many cases instead of wooden pins, they had all held firmly during their long life, and the roof had rested with the comfort of movement allowed by bearing on a joint of goatskins between the stone corbels and its own oak principals. The original stone corbels were held back by great flattened iron cramps and none of the iron had rusted or deteriorated appreciably.

No sign of the sinking sun of the Middle Ages in this work—or if there is, one can only say—what a glorious sunset!

To the designer of this great building I have found no reference. If from the accounts of Eltham Palace and certain

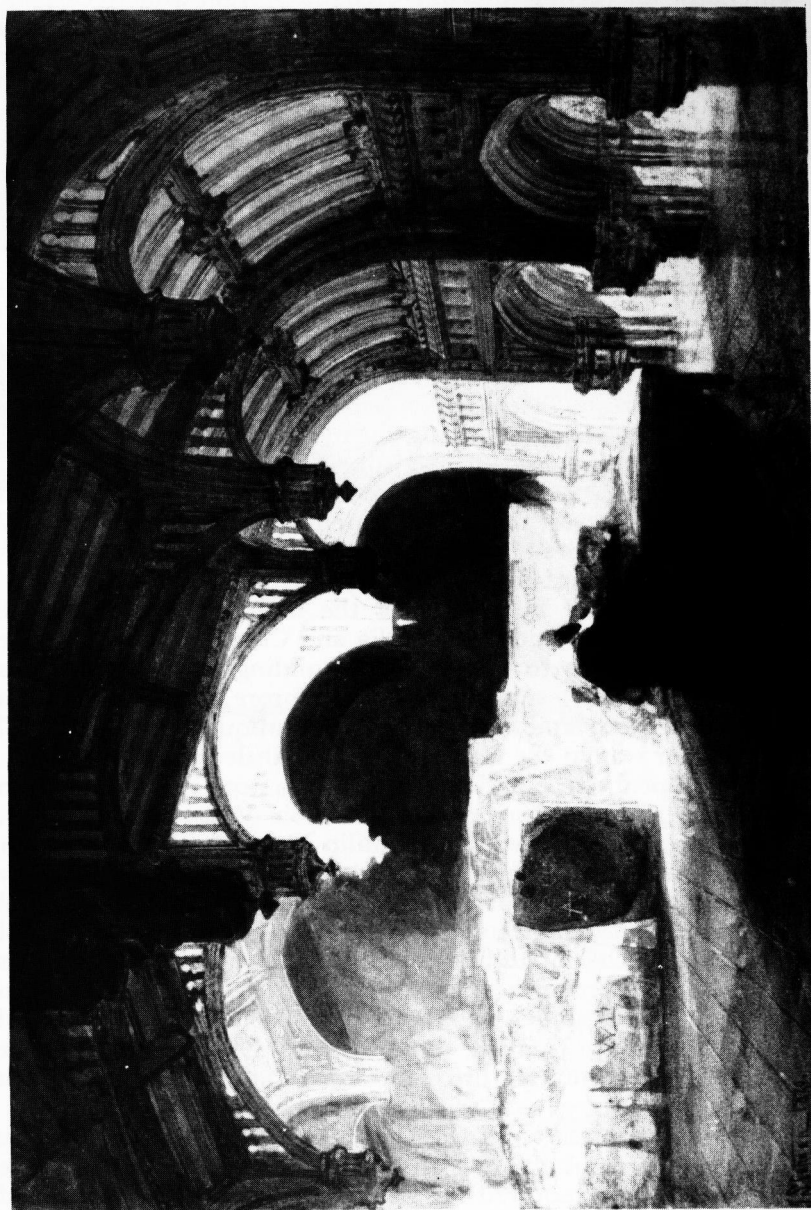
comparisons one guesses at a possible name, or the actual name may be unearthed, he is forgotten by history. Except in the rarest and most famous cases, when a Michelangelo is remembered rather than a Julius, it is the important employers of the time that are commemorated, the building bishops of the Middle Ages, Sir John Crosby in this case, or the Vickers or the Esso building even in these days. It is difficult for us architects to realise that it is the people who give us our opportunities who deserve the credit, not only for their vision in providing the funds but also for their discrimination in choosing us—with that we have to rest content.

There is time for only the briefest recital of the history of Crosby Place since its building. Sir John Crosby died in 1475. In 1483 Richard Duke of Gloucester occupied it. Legend took over from history in the 19th century—the parlour and great chamber were rechristened “Council Chamber” and “Throne Room”, but I expect the only occasions on which many will have heard of the Place are the three references which Shakespeare made to it in his *Richard III*. Between 1501 and 1519 it was held successively by Sir Bartholomew Reed and Sir John Rest, both important city merchants, and it was the scene of many city and state functions and provided entertainment and lodging for the eminent and for embassies from abroad.

Among the most famous of its tenants was Thomas More who held the lease in 1523 and 1524, but he very soon sold it to Antonio Bonvisi, a Lucca merchant and banker and patron of learning, who held it from the Priory till the Dissolution and afterwards from the King. He was a great friend of Sir Thomas More and remained in constant association with him until the latter's execution. A last connection with the More family, was when William Roper, his son-in-law, and his nephew William Rastell, editor of his works, took on the lease in 1547.

During the rest of the 16th century Crosby Place was the home of various leading city merchants and during this period it continued frequently to provide the scene for receiving foreign ambassadors and other dignitaries. In 1609 it was inherited by Sir William Compton, later first Earl of Northampton, who had married (and in fact eloped with) the daughter of the rich merchant and owner of Crosby Place, Sir John Spencer. The Earls of Northampton owned it till 1671, but during a large part of that period it was held by the East India Company.

Crosby Place escaped the fire of London, but only to suffer from a serious fire itself in 1672. The hall, however, was saved and saved yet again from a big fire in the house two years later. No longer was it even to be a house again, but the hall itself instead of a place of reception for kings, queens and ambassadors, became simply a valuable large covered space and was used first as a Presbyterian Meeting House and then as a



The ceiling of Crosby Hall in 1830 from a watercolour by J.S. Cotman. It was then being used as a warehouse by Messrs. Holmes & Hall, packers. The picture clearly shows the inserted floor. (Norfolk Museums Service, Norwich Castle Museum).

warehouse for varying sorts of merchandise from wine to carpets. For the meeting house a floor was put in and there are prints showing an external staircase mounting straight up the side of the hall and an entrance over the upper transom through the oriel into the building. J.S. Cotman climbed up there, as he was wont to do among so many decaying treasures of architecture, and has left a delightful sketch with light falling through amid the beautiful pendants and the bales of merchandise.

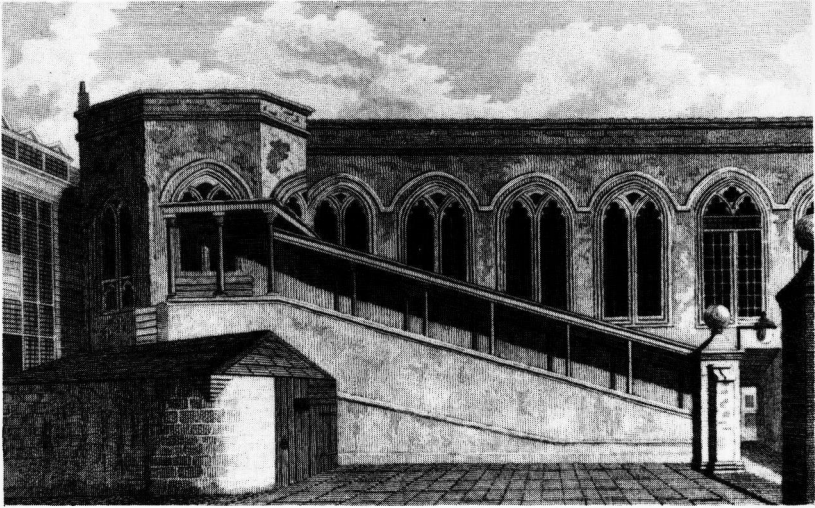
In 1831 Crosby Hall was advertised for sale. This was the occasion of the first public appeal to save it. The architect E. Blore gave his services and restoration began. Thomas Willement made and gave glass carrying the arms of subscribers to the fund. When money ran out, in 1835, a redoubtable lady, Mrs. Maria Hackett, came forward and bought it. The architect, and early historian of Crosby Place, took a hand in the work and eventually the north wing assumed, largely due to his scholarship, something of its former appearance.

The hall was put to various worthy uses, but once more in 1862 it had to revert to being a warehouse and from 1868-1907 both hall and restored parlour wing owed their continued preservation to their flourishing as a restaurant.

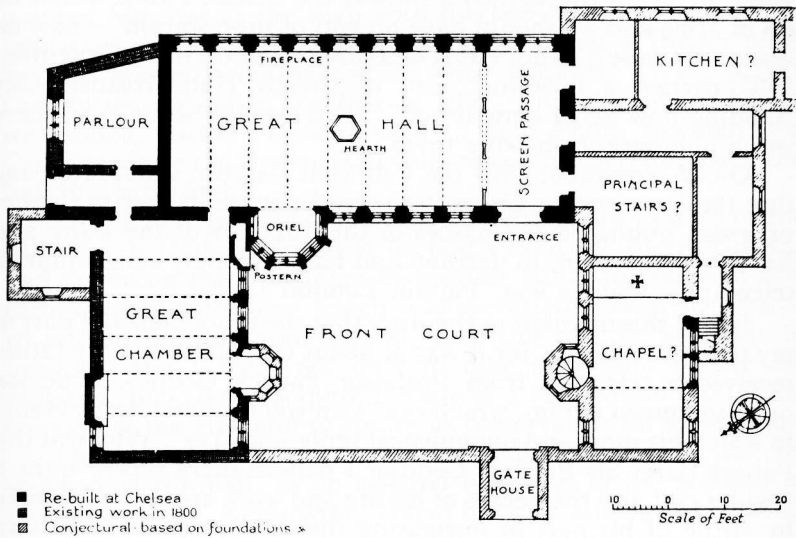
The great and final crisis of the hall occurred when the Chartered Bank of India, Australia and China acquired the site in 1907, proposing to demolish the buildings and build offices there. This caused a tremendous public furore, one which though the fight was long and the subject of it so unique, ended in the all too familiar way in the face of commercial development.

The appeal to the nation was led by a powerful preservation committee. Among its members were Sir Vezey Strong, W.D. Caroe the architect (who with Philip Norman, and my father helping, were to produce the London Survey volume already planned for the next year), Nigel Bond Secretary of the National Trust and C.Y. Sturge (of the L.C.C. and later to be a tower of strength over the rebuilding). The L.C.C. did everything in its power to support the cause. It had in its Clerk a very keen antiquary and founder member of the London Topographical Society, Laurence Gomme, and of course the whole body of the Local Government, Records and Museum Committee, which included Mr. Sturge and was naturally deeply interested.

These two bodies and the City Corporation endeavoured to persuade the Bank to take an alternative site nearby, but the purchase money required far exceeded the £50,000 subscribed and the amount of public money which these two bodies could allow to be added to it. At the same time the Board of Trade nearly decided to take over the building for the use of its Commercial Intelligence Branch, but this proposal fell through, in that they were not empowered to pay a rent calculated on



Crosby Hall when still in Bishopsgate, drawn in 1805 by Prattent and engraved by E. Shirt.



Crosby Hall: Conjectural ground plan of the building as at Bishopsgate.

anything but a commercial basis and could take no account of the importance historically of what they wished to do.

Every possible scheme that could be devised was tried, while the Bank's patience and goodwill diminished monthly, until in November 1907 the Bank refused to give more time. It had however allowed photographs to be taken and detailed surveys to be made. The L.C.C. file, for access to which I am grateful to Mr. Ashley Barker, contains interesting first hand reports from those who made the notes and who, after demolition began, watched how near to old work it was reaching. The Bank had also cooperated commendably in offering to have the ancient building taken down with extra care and have each element of stone or timber, which could be preserved and used again, numbered and stored at its own expense. The L.C.C., though it interested itself in how the numbering was being done, still in January 1908 was not prepared to acquire the materials.

During all this time the press had been active. I will confine myself to reading you just one or two extracts chosen at random from the collection in the file at the G.L.C. and in the interesting file of the Bishopsgate Institute Library, which Mr. David Webb has kindly allowed me to consult.

In the *Daily Graphic* of 14 July 1907 Laurence Gomme was quoted: "Were it St. Marks at Venice or a piece of Swiss scenery about to be cut through by a railway the British Public would be up in arms and we should have no end of protestation" — now no one would raise a hand, etc. *The Daily Chronicle* of 14 September 1907 carried a headline "End of Crosby Hall. Historic City Building now being demolished", "Wreckers at work" and there was a photograph showing them.

On 23 November 1907 the *Pall Mall Gazette*, when reporting that the Preservation Committee could not see its way to further progress, published the names of the directors of the Bank and half, it would seem, in derision and half invitingly added that its telegraphic address was "Pigtail, London"!

It is at this moment in the story that the more personal part of my paper can begin, for it was at about that time that my father received a telegram from Professor Patrick Geddes, a person quite unknown to him, which ran "Can you rebuild Crosby Hall?" to which his short and unequivocal reply was "Yes". Who was this Patrick (later Sir Patrick) Geddes? I believe there is now quite a Geddes cult and the details of his life and work are being followed by virtue of his part in instigating the modern pursuit of town planning and the study of sociology. Some of us may wish now that students were aware that other faculties than the latter existed in our universities, but at that time it was fresh in the minds of this vigorous man and his circle. *A most Unsettling Person* is the title of a book on his ideas and life by Paddy Kitchen

published last year. She was quoting Sir Patrick Abercrombie when she chose it.

This critic of the dry side of academic learning and earner of academic antagonisms had as one of his great interests nonetheless, the provision of university students' hostels. It was in this cause that he promoted the University and City Association of London. We are concerned here with, and the telegram was occasioned by, the plan he was forming to extend More House on the corner of Beaufort Street and Cheyne Walk, already a London University Hall of residence and already intended for completion over the whole site, so that Crosby Hall could be recreated and be included in the group in the way that old colleges possessed their halls.

Who also was this young Walter Godfrey, not yet 28, and why was the wire addressed to him? He had written the R.I.B.A. prize essay in 1906 on George Devey, his predecessor in business; he had published in 1907 a reconstruction of the Fortune Theatre, the wide circulation of which astonished him, and he had written articles in various periodicals and contributed drawings to Garner and Stratton. But not for some three years yet were his well known books *The English Staircase* and *History of Architecture in London* to come out, nor had he or his partner Edmund Wratten carried out any project of the magnitude that was now proposed. It was probably his work for the London Survey Committee which pointed him out as the man with the knowledge and energy to take it on. At the time when he lodged in Chelsea at the age of 19 he had started working on the four volumes, of which the Committee published the first in 1909. And he had, as I have mentioned, earlier, worked hard to help Philip Norman and Caroe produce the Crosby Hall volume and he therefore knew the building intimately.

So it is that we find a first letter from him to Geddes of the 21st March 1908, saying that he had visited the site in Chelsea and enclosing three sketches of possible siting for the hall and recommending the one which was eventually adopted. This is what the Professor wanted and, with this aid, he was able to persuade the L.C.C. not only to take ownership of the old material, but also to acquire the site as a contribution to the re-erection of the Hall and to ensure its preservation for all to enjoy.

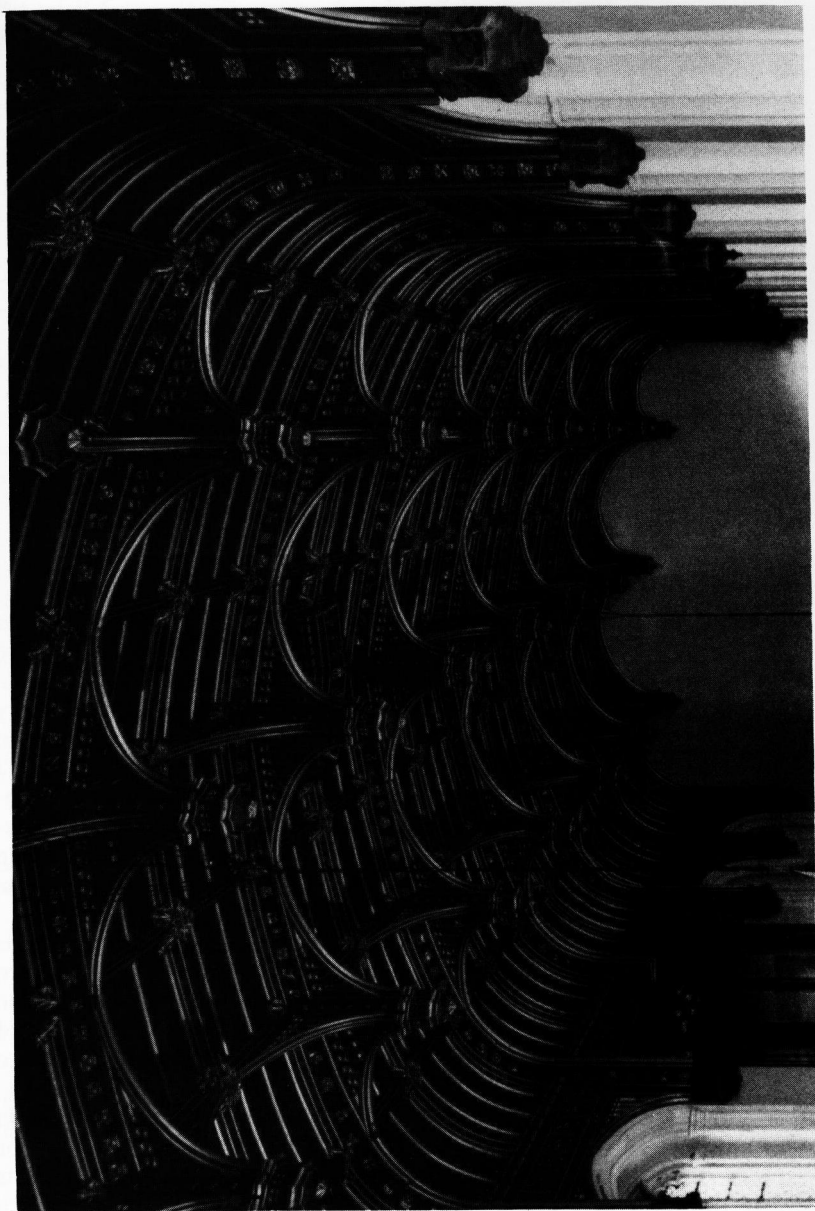
There was at this time one competing scheme for the re-erection of the hall, as an isolated building, in the grounds of Leighton House, Kensington. It had not such advantages and did not gain acceptance.

The contract for the re-erection was let to an excellent firm of builders, Messrs. Trollope & Colls of whom my father had words only of praise and would have wanted still to record his thanks to Col. Elliott with whom he dealt and Mr. White, their foreman,

for the cooperation he received. And he was fortunate too in his quantity surveyor, Hamilton Turner, a lifelong friend with whom he had many discussions later about a book on Architectural Procedure and Practice, which Turner wrote and which has been the standby of most architectural students almost to the present day and of which the new edition still is to some. I say fortunate, because together they worked out the approximate estimates and together they watched the cost of the work with the amount of anxiety a young architect was bound to feel over a price which he had been required to guarantee he would not exceed. The stonework went against him in the event, but the roof went together more easily and saw him through.

A personal memoir of my father's of this time is worth quoting, I think, for two stories. The first was an incident in connection with the old cottages in Danvers Street which needed to be cleared from the site. Having got over other historians' objections on the grounds of modest architectural interest and the L.C.C. having given the demolition its blessings, there was one other problem. In his words "there was some slight ground for thinking that Dean Swift had lodged in one of them (No. 7), which was then in the occupation of a Miss Lida d'Esterre who kept a school for damsels (she said) between the ages of seven and seventy. She was Irish and a most determined opponent of the removal of the houses. I therefore resolved to call on her. We had quite a dramatic interview, in which, while I was urging the greater importance of securing the site for Crosby Hall, a terrific thunderstorm broke over Chelsea, the day became as dark as night and the good lady took me down to her basement kitchen and made me a cup of tea. We parted the best of friends and she presented me with a copy of *Wild Earth*, poems by Padraic Colum, which she inscribed to my 'infant daughter, Lucy'."

The other story is concerned with (once more in his words) "a very pleasant and fruitful friendship, which came from this work in my acquaintance with Clement Y. Sturge, the member of the L.C.C. who took most personal interest in it. He lived at Rodborough Heights, Stroud, Glos. and always travelled with two large cats in baskets, which he liberated in the railway carriage. I was his guest several times and designed his Italian garden. He was immensely corpulent, in fact I have never seen a like human circumference and one day, in the lunch-hour, when we visited the works at Chelsea by ourselves, he insisted on going up a ladder to see the roof. I followed close behind him, conscious that I barely weighed eight stone. Half way up he became giddy and I had a momentary panic, but by clasping him tight round the thighs and telling him to hold on and rest himself on my chest, we managed to get down safely step by step. It was largely due to Mr. Sturge's help and his command of Sir Laurence Gomme's



A forest of pendants: The ceiling of Crosby Hall, as reconstructed in Chelsea.
(Colin Westwood).

interest, that the Survey of London became firmly established."

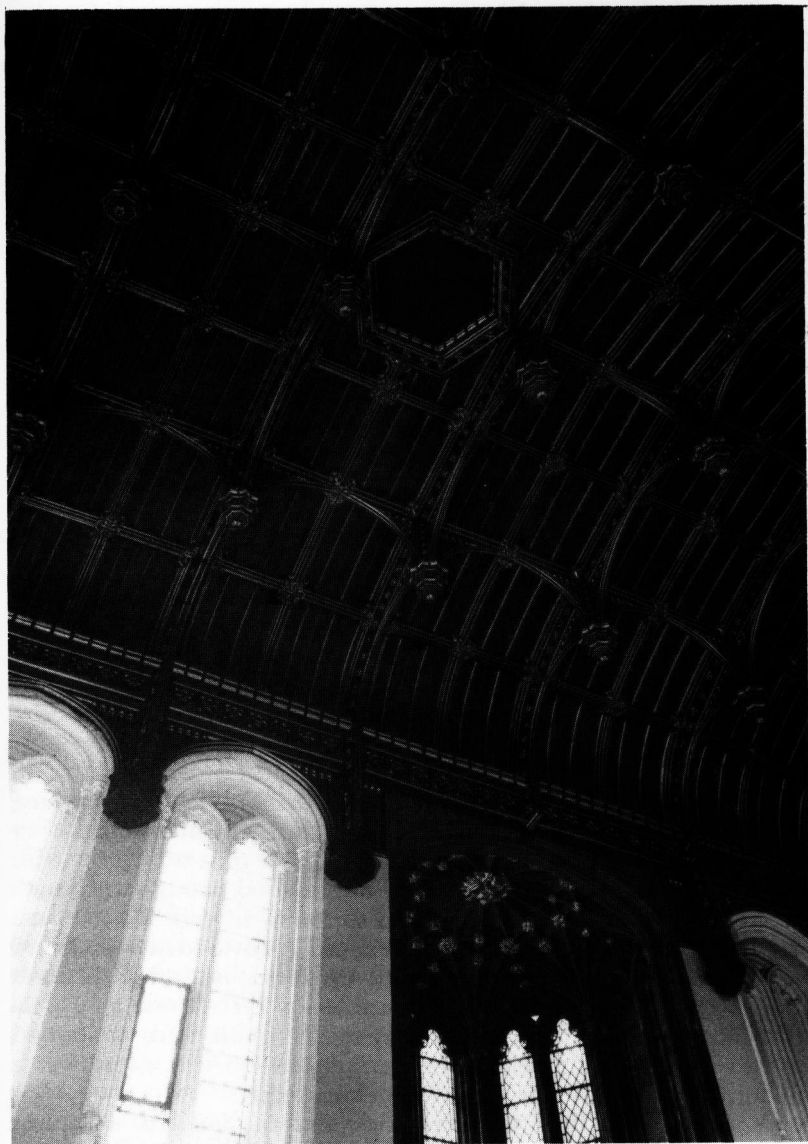
An attractive light on this man's nature is thrown by a letter from him to my father of 18 March 1910 in which he wrote "By the way Mr. Norman L.C.C. member for Chelsea sprained his ankle rather badly yesterday jumping off the highest platform in the roof of Crosby Hall. He was hobbling about on two sticks, unable to put his foot to the ground at the Council today. I tell him it is better after all to be old and heavy and mindful of one's steps, than young and agile and foolishly come to grief!"

The file of the work takes us back to a different age, where foreman White (that "superb builder" as my father described him) in his bowler hat, controlled his men, who were similarly topped off. One can imagine his delight as they saw the accuracy with which the oriel's vault had been constructed and pieced it together again themselves using the very setting out lines that the 15th century masons had scored upon the stones. How they must have enjoyed devising together a bed of sand heaped upon the scaffold boards. This, as a supplement to their cradling, was to allow the stone ribs to lie firm until the jointing set. One can also imagine my father going back to his office and laboriously writing his letters in long hand and copying them into the letter books. The first relevant one of these was missing during our search for material, but I was thankfully able at last to find it shortly before writing this paper.

Most of the correspondence was carried on with the Secretary to the Association, Mr. Ross, who wrote from their office in More's gardens. Though very formal letters were exchanged, I expect the relationship was a friendly one. A newspaper photograph taken towards the end of the project shows Mr. Ross described as supervising the re-erection work. I may add, returning to one of my earlier thoughts in this paper; I have not come across a photograph of the architect in that posture.

One exchange of letters which pleased me among those on this file was my father's success in persuading the L.C.C., fire regulations notwithstanding, that the main door out on to the terrace (set in a heavily moulded and recessed framework of stone) could not be expected to do anything so incongruous as to open *outwards*.

Finally as the file draws to the end we find it concentrating on preparedness for the opening pageant. Estimates came in for stages of seats and awnings; arrangements and rearrangements were thought out. The Pageant was looked upon by Geddes as a great opportunity for raising funds for the cause of establishing the hall and it seems to have aroused tremendous enthusiasm in its authors. The proof of a programme for the event presaged the actors' procession of the occupants of Crosby Place whom I mentioned at the beginning of this paper and many more. There



Another view of the ceiling showing the top of the oriel. In 1966 the mediaeval splendour of the ceiling was revived when colouring in red and gold was added, the pendants picked out in green. This also brought out the structure and form of the ceiling.
(Colin Westwood).

had been so many embassies and important visitors to Crosby Place, that the organizers could not have lacked the opportunity to vary the numbers in the caste according to the supply. One of the more difficult scenes to represent (especially on a cold day) would have been Lord Mayor Reed's Pageant, which consisted of "four giants, one unicorn, one dromedary, one luce (pike), one camel, one ass, one dragon, six hobby horses, and sixteen naked boys." Finally, if they still needed to fill in scenes, they could have reproduced a procession of guests in Elizabethan costume to the opening banquet after Mrs. Hackett's benefaction in 1835.

Unfortunately the Pageant never took place. The death of King Edward VII (who incidentally had expressed his personal support of the original efforts to save the hall on its city site) intervened and put a stop to all such festivities planned at that time.

While you have been looking at this hall, you may have been wondering whether I would give an indication of which parts are original and which are old. None of the vaulted basement was brought here or reproduced. Nor was the floor, traces of which showed that it used to be paved with diagonal squares of Purbeck marble through which ran two longitudinal bands of white stone. The present oak floor is therefore an innovation.

The original walls were of rubble, faced externally with Reigate stone (which was the stone used throughout) and plastered inside. Reigate is notorious for decay and most of the facing had been renewed in Bath stone during previous restorations and this too had suffered. My father decided to use Portland stone (the core of his walls was brick). He often told me that if we put Portland into our repairs, no one would ever mistake it for original, since the medieval use of it was only local. Some of the old Reigate which he thought good enough to cherish and re-use, I am afraid I have had to renew myself. To keep an original piece of work, however decayed, provided it was sound was the lesson he always tried to convey. It is this kind of difficult choice which you will be aware continually faces those who deal with old buildings. The north and south (gable end) walls had already been rebuilt before the demolition. In fact there was a modern wall on the line of the previous screen.

You will see that the east side externally is a complete renewal, because it had been mutilated by buildings added there. For the same reason there was no trace of the paired windows over the gallery, details of which he took from the western one. A few original timbers of the gallery floor remained in position, where it had come in the end to form the ceiling of the carriage way through the building to Crosby Square at this point. The new gallery has been constructed at the original level in relation to the floor and the new flat ceiling has been derived from the evidence

that the last principal of the roof had a flat side to it on the south and that therefore the roof did not extend further; also from the fact that the windows were drawn together in a pair, leaving no room for a roof corbel between.

The interior stone work of the windows of the oriel, of the door to the parlour wing and of the fireplace is all original work, though restored of course in places. Note particularly Sir John Crosby's crest in the boss of the oriel vault. It is on the helmet of an esquire. His full arms were Sable, a chevron Ermine between three rams trippant Argent, armed and hooped Or. Note also at the dais end that the sills of the windows (blind on the parlour wing side) are higher than the rest. This may have been to clear some buildings outside or in order to accommodate a greater length of tapestry at that end.

Old timbers of the roof structure above what could be seen were not retained, though in the L.C.C. reports at the City site they had passed their "medical", subject to treatment at leaks, the urgent need for which they were just in time to notice. Otherwise the great queen post trusses and common rafters had been reported as mainly sound. The new roof which my father designed was of scissor braced construction, very well suited to form a snug fixing to the arched shape of the original and visible parts which were to be retained. All the main timbers here are original and very little repair had to be done at all. No doubt good organisation had a lot to do with it, but builder and architect were impressed by the unforced simplicity of its fitting back together.

There is a plan in the L.C.C. file prepared after one inspection in the City, coloured to show which panels and which subsidiary rafters were replacements. Mr. Hebdon who did the investigation detected three stages of renewal. The original panels he identified by the way they were fitted into grooves all round; the first stage of renewals (which were of equally straight grained oak) he detected by the fact that they were fitted into rebates and held by wood fillets fixed by $1\frac{1}{4}$ in. wrot clouts. Mr. A.F. Henderson, presumably his superior, had added a note that it was possible the ribs were framed together before many of the panels had been prepared for fixing and therefore when the remainder were ready the upper sides of the ribs had to be cut away to permit the panels to be inserted.

So the renewals had probably only been confined to a few panels in what were described as "hedgework oak" and to the last stage at that time, indicated by five panels of deal. The octagonal louvre frame was there, but its upper part and the whole cupola above were conjectured by my father.

There is one aspect of the restoration of this roof about which we would have liked more information. According to his own and

other opinions of that time, my father was happy to see the many coats of "modern" paint from the hall's restaurant days and before, pickled off, and the beautiful colour of the oak welcomingly revealed. Today, and of course in later years he would have done this too (and as Lethaby used to), we would have meticulously searched for traces of medieval colouring and gilding.

The roof now has some colour and I am glad to say that my father, in his lifetime, listened to our arguments and endorsed what we might do one day. It was first seriously mooted in 1963 some two years after he had died; but the scheme would not have gone through had it not been reawakened in 1966 by an apposite bequest to Crosby Hall. It awakened too a great deal of argument by both pundits and any thoughtful person, not least by the architects who were presented with the problem.

I pointed out that the ceiling would certainly have been highly coloured and gilded originally; that any observer returning from the fifteenth century, would have looked up at the bare oak and felt himself to be in a barn. Yet I did not want to attempt to restore that kind of elaboration which so often used to destroy the form.

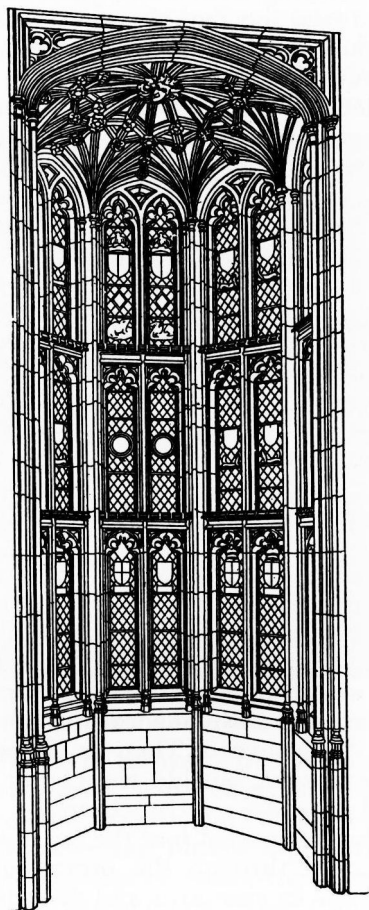
We therefore prepared four samples in distemper colour and artificial gold paint, in reducing garishness down to plain wood and gold, which I advocated at the time. I was well satisfied, however, with the next sample which was the red and gold then chosen and which you see now.

I hope you feel that the form of the ceiling has been brought out by this, but not over-emphasized, and that the colour would perhaps have been passed as just adequate by our 15th century visitor.

It has always seemed to me remarkable how near the top of the trades the painters stood in the Middle Ages. Superb sculpture was finished just right from the artist's chisel and then was painted and gilded all over. The masons sawed their stone and fitted their joints with great skill, thinking not at all that the beautiful appearance of their workmanship would be of any account, because the whole was to be painted over or limewashed if that could not be afforded. When I myself started life as an assistant to a clerk of works, I heard many times the low opinion in which the other trades held the painters. Perhaps this is not because they deserved it, but because at last the others were getting their own back.

I should be ending here with these remarks on the ceiling, the main object of your visit to this hall. I must add however that on account of the 1914 war the University and City Association never had an opportunity to complete the scheme for their quadrangle of collegiate buildings. The eventual completion of the north wing in 1927 by the British Federation of University Women as an

international hall of residence is quite another story. The rump (or rather forelegs) against the More's Gardens flats of our own scheme at the end of the 1950s for completion of the south range is another story too; but this talk to you must not be allowed to be prolonged by either of them. You are after all the Ancient Monuments Society.



The oriel window at Crosby Hall.