

History of Cliffords Inn since 1979

In 1979 the building was completely renovated. In an attempt to improve sales of the flats, in 1983 a post-modernistic pseudo-classical front was added to the east side of the building facing Fetter Lane. In the words of Boyd Auger, the architect, the owner "wanted to raise the tone of the building, to upgrade the front to match the quality of the work being done inside". It was, according to Pevsner, among the first post-modernistic commercial buildings. "Renovations of 1983 by Boyd Auger included refacing the entrance block on Fetter Lane. Here super-imposed colonnades of GRC (*glass fibre reinforced concrete*) stand against bronzed-glass curtain-walling: amongst the first such revivals of classical forms for commercial buildings."¹ In 1983 *Country Life* wrote that it "brightens up an area of London not noted for lively architecture."² At the time the facade was added to the building in 1983, it was the subject of considerable interest in the architectural press.

The facade included two entrances, one on the left to the offices on the lower floors and one on the right to the flats on floors 3 to 9, extending to floor 6, covering 7 floors in all, and leaving the two upper floors and the penthouses not visible behind the balustrade. The existing external wall facing Fetter Lane was retained and the new facade was added as a bolt-on classical structure.

Several photographs are held in the Library of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) in their rooms at the Victoria and Albert museum. These include the original facade (reference 37075/1), the replacement facade (37075/3), detail of the cornices and underside of the architraves (37075/4), the glass fibre reinforced cement (GRC) column sheaths (1), architrave blocks (2) and capitals (3) in production (37075/5), the removal of the former window frames (1) and the installation of new aluminium-framed double glazed sealed units (2) (37075/6).

Whereas most post-modernistic buildings have been new buildings in which the architect and client chose to build their building in a post modernistic style and therefore had fairly free reign with proportions, this was not the case at Cliffords Inn. Cliffords Inn is almost unique in that a modern and totally functional building was converted by refurbishing it by a curtain wall using three tiers of Doric, Ionic and Corinthian columns with a 'free-floating' porch at pavement level, see Figure 1.

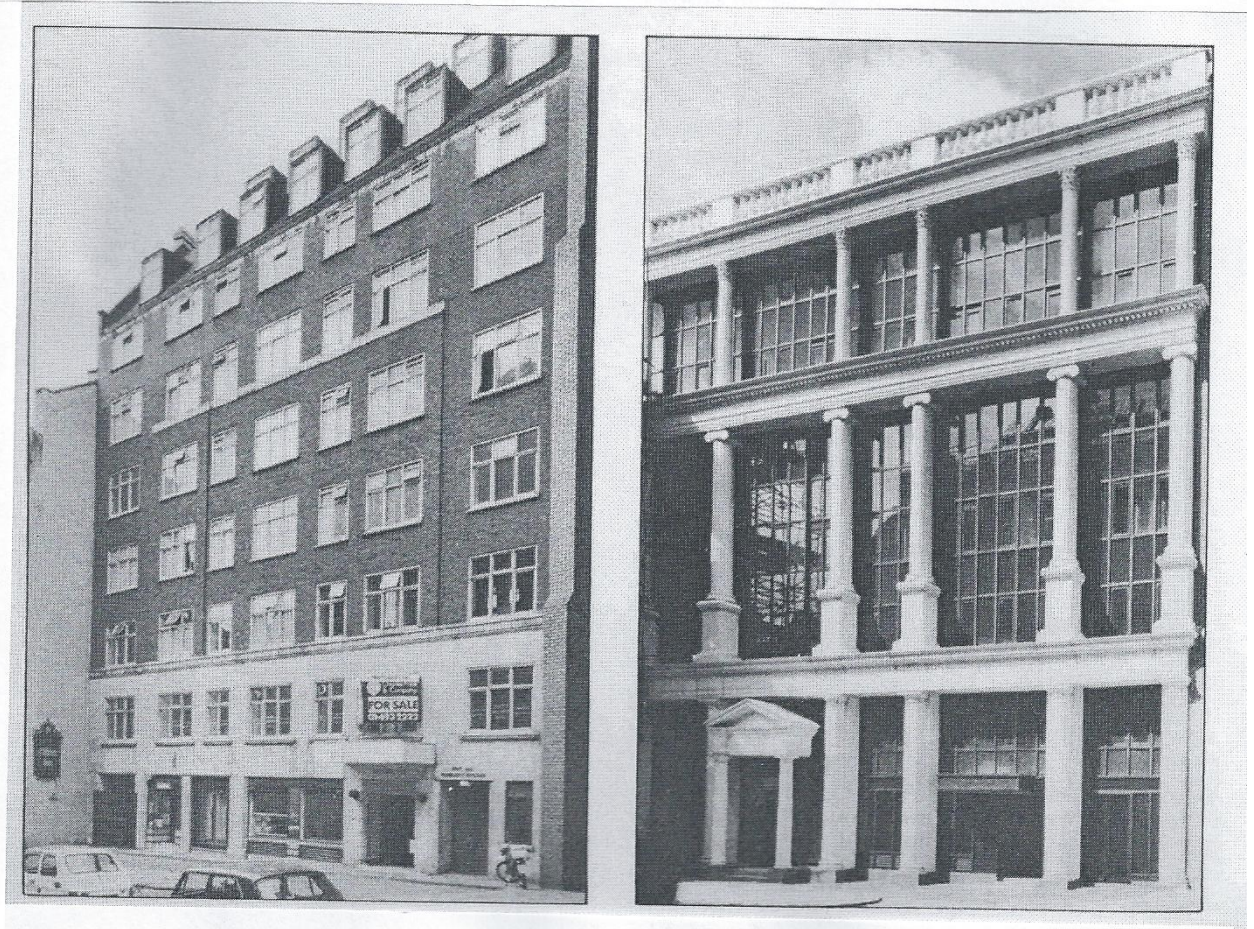


Figure 1. Clifford's Inn (left) the original 1930s facade and (right) the new facade set in front of a curtain wall of dark bronze anodised aluminium and tinted glass, covering the ground floor to floor 6.

Boyd Auger's versatility as an architect can be appreciated from the catalogue of the Library of the RIBA. In addition to Clifford's Inn and the two buildings for which he is perhaps most remembered, the Gyrotron at the Expo '67 in Montreal (Ref. 9) and his computer-designed housing plans that were shown at the summer exhibition of the Royal Academy in 1968, he worked on the Venezuelan museum and cultural centre in London, domestic housing, a new theatre and concert hall, and a mobile theatre/television studio for the National Eisteddfod of Wales. He contributed articles to architectural journals on the use of ornaments and of various less conventional materials including plastic-coated steel, aluminium, glass and precast concrete cladding.³

It is taken for granted these days that computers are used in architectural design and in all sorts of other design work, but Boyd Auger was a pioneer in the use of computers in architectural design and a milestone in this development was the inclusion of his computer housing plans which created a sensation when they were shown at the summer exhibition of the Royal Academy in 1968 (Refs 9,10) "In 1967 I was invited to Italy," Auger said "to submit plans for making a holiday resort out of a small island, about half a mile by a quarter mile. It was barren, very rocky, but I was told it could only be a paying proposition if 1,500 houses could be erected. At first I

just didn't see how it could be done. Then I decided to use a computer.' The computer, fed with all the facts, came up with a plan which showed exactly where all the houses could be sited. Then Auger designed the actual houses. Unfortunately lack of finance halted the building scheme, but Auger decided to submit the plans to the Royal Academy. He admits that he was doubtful if such a revolutionary method would be considered suitable for inclusion in the architectural section. In fact, it was his exhibit which attracted by far the most attention, and the BBC invited him to appear in their "Cities of the Future" television programme." From there Auger went on to become a pioneer in computer-aided design and published a very early book on the subject in 1972.⁴

References:

1. *The Buildings of England. London 1: the City of London*, Simon Bradley and Nikolaus Pevsner, Penguin Books, 1997.
2. Cliffords Inn: classical 1930s building refurbished and new curtain wall added: Architects Boyd Auger, *Country Life*, volume 174, p. 418 (1983).
3. Precast concrete cladding. *Built Environment*, volume 2, p. 651-657 (1973).
4. Computers and the architect. *Architects' Journal*, volume 159, p.64 (1974).

