



**Listing Application for 1 Poultry, City of London  
Twentieth Century Society, June 2015**

**Background**

*“The No.1 Poultry site posed an overwhelming question at the level of representational form in three ways. Firstly the primacy of its location in the city required that an exceptional statement should be made; secondly propriety demanded that this statement respond to the individual nature of its extraordinary ring of neighbouring buildings; and thirdly it should match up to the level of visual variety and character of the listed incumbents on the site...If we imagine a baton passed from Wren’s St Stephen Walbrook to Dance the Elder’s Mansion House, then to Soane’s Bank of England and thence to Lutyens’ Midland Bank, which architect would be capable of concluding the sequence without fumbling it? Without question there was only one conceivable choice – James Stirling and his partner Michael Wilford.”* Architecture Today September 1998, Colin St John Wilson.

1 Poultry sits on the junction of Queen Victoria Street and Poultry, and at the convergence of Threadneedle Street, Cornhill, Princes Street and the entrance to Bank underground station. It is one of the most prestigious sites in the heart of the City of London, surrounded by a range of highly acclaimed historic buildings. It was designed and constructed between 1986 and 1998 by the architects James Stirling Michael Wilford and Associates Ltd (JSMWAL). The construction of 1 Poultry followed a series of highly controversial planning battles – mainly relating to the proposed demolition of Victorian buildings that previously occupied the site - spanning over 30 years.

1 Poultry contains shops at concourse and ground floor levels with 5 floors of offices above (10,200 sqm), a roof garden and restaurant. A pedestrian passage through the building links to an open court which brings daylight into the centre of the building and to the shopping colonnades on the Poultry and Queen Victoria Street frontages. The court, with interlocking circular and triangular plans, extends to basement shopping and Bank underground station below.

The building is currently owned by Perella Weinberg Real Estate Fund II LP. The principal tenant is Aviva (floors 2 – 5), who has occupied the building since it opened. Retail tenants on ground and concourse levels include Crabtree & Evelyn, Gap, Starbucks and Austin Reed, and Regus operate serviced office facilities on floor 1. The rooftop garden is fully accessible to the public with a restaurant Coq D’Argent.

1 Poultry, which has been virtually unaltered since completion, is currently under threat due to planned alterations to the principal facades and the internal drum that we consider would cause harm to and undermine the design concept as conceived by Sir James Stirling and thus its very special architectural significance. We have been informally consulted by the agents for the applicants at pre-application stage, and the proposals have been published in the architectural press (Architects Journal, 21 May 2015). The main changes include the loss of the ground floor colonnades on Queen Victoria Street and Poultry, the loss of the voids behind the columns at first floor level. New openings are proposed to the internal drum, and a new main office entrance is proposed on Queen Victoria

Street in place of a shop. A planning application for these alterations has been submitted and is in the process of being validated by the Corporation of London.

This building was reviewed by the Twentieth Century Society's advisory Casework Committee in April 2015 and it was unanimously agreed that the Society should put this building forward for spot listing at grade II\* for the following reasons:

- Architectural interest: 1 Poultry is an important 'landmark' building by one of Britain's foremost twentieth century architects of international standing. It is the only large scale commercial office development built to Stirling's design in Britain, and his last significant work designed before he died in 1992.
- Technological interest: The building was an outstanding example of a highly prestigious, speculative office and retail development commissioned by a forward thinking client in the 1990s. Built in the heart of the City of London on one of the most high profile sites in Britain, the design accommodates heavy pedestrian flows and integrates public transport access. It was designed to complement its highly significant historic context and is arguably the most important example of 'post-modernist' architecture in Britain. It already appears in many art history books and publications and in his 2008 review of British Architecture in the RIBA Journal Hugh Pearman described it a "postmodern apotheosis"
- Historic interest: 1 Poultry sits on a highly controversial site and the drawn out planning battles and fight to save the original historic buildings on the site is part of the interesting history of this site, planning procedures in the late 20th Century and the debates between conservationists and "modern design". 1 Poultry forms a key element of Stirling's oeuvre taking key references from his many internationally highly acclaimed works, in particular the State Gallery.

We requested in May 2015, and have been given, full access to the architect's project archive which contains detailed descriptions of the design as originally conceived, the public inquiries, design statements and evidence by James Stirling, the Planning Inspector's Report and the Secretary of State's Decision Letter. We then interviewed Laurence Bain who was the responsible partner architect/partner at the office of JSMWAL throughout the course of the entire project.

#### History

In 1985 James Stirling Michael Wilford and Associates was commissioned to design a mixed use office building in the heart of the City of London. The site, one of the most prestigious in the square mile is bounded by Poultry, Queen Victoria Street and Sise Lane. The original historic site was a mix of Victorian commercial buildings, eight of which were listed and it lies within a Conservation Area. The Mappin & Webb building was the most impressive and prominent – sat at the 'prow' of the triangular site.

The site already had a history of planning battles. A public inquiry had been held into a previous proposal commissioned by the owner Peter Palumbo. Palumbo had invited Mies Van der Rohe to design a tower and plaza on the site in 1967 which was subsequently refused consent, and then appealed. The then Secretary of State's refused planning permission, but in reaching his decision, he stated that he did 'not rule out redevelopment of the site if there was an acceptable proposal for replacing existing buildings'. By 1986 Stirling Wilford had prepared two alternative designs, scheme A – retaining the corner Mappin & Webb building, and B, total redevelopment, both occupying a smaller site than the Mies proposal.

After negotiations with the Corporation of London, scheme B was chosen for development. However the controversy created by the previous public inquiry and concern over the loss of the Mappin & Webb and other buildings led to another public inquiry. The project archive contains documents which confirm the strength of feeling on both sides of the argument. In October 1988 after the second inquiry, the developed scheme B design was approved by the Secretary of State. The Inspector stated that the design, "might well be a masterpiece". This was followed by a further two years of legal

argument into the propriety of the Secretary of State's decision which was finally resolved in the House of Lords when five law lords confirmed the Secretary of State's decision. After a third public inquiry in 1993, agreement was obtained from the Department of Transport to close Bucklersbury, a narrow road which crossed the site. Construction began in 1994 and was completed in 1997 (Wilford Stirling Wilford, 1996, p61).

## **Brief**

Laurence Bain told us that there were two main client requirements. First, the client wanted a headquarters office building that would stand out: "The building had to have a presence, this was critical – so that you could see the building from Bank Junction. They wanted to give prospective tenants the prestigious image they were looking for". Bain argues that this has in effect succeeded as Aviva (formerly Norwich Union) has occupied the majority of the building since it opened, and images of the building as viewed from Bank Junction were used to promote the company on its website. It also became known as such a distinctive and 'iconic' building that despite their opposition to the redevelopment of the site at the public inquiry, English Heritage launched their 1997 Annual Report and held a reception at No.1 Poultry.

Another element in the brief, according to Bain, was that the site had to accommodate high numbers of pedestrians at street level access to Bank Underground, a public walkway across the site and to maximise shop frontages on Poultry and Queen Victoria Street. The City pointed to James Stirling at an early briefing stage that they were concerned about the widths of the pavements and meeting notes confirm that the colonnades were discussed with the City as the possible solution to the problem as early as 1986. Notes and drawings in Stirling's hand show the colonnades to be a well considered design response to the requirements of the brief. In November 1988 Ove Arup carried out studies of people flow around and through the existing site as well as projections for Scheme B. The Ove Arup report was part of the evidence at the Inquiry. So in response to a requirements of the City JSMWAL developed a design that responded in an intelligent way that was tested by Ove Arup and scrutinised by the Inspector.

## **Building in context**

1 Poultry sits on a highly prestigious site in the heart of the City of London. The triangular site is metres from Bank underground station and it is surrounded by historic buildings including the Bank of England (Soane), the former Midland Bank (Lutyens) and St Mary Woolnoth (Hawksmoor).

As Stirling pointed out in his evidence to the 1988 Public Inquiry, there are clear links between this historic context – that spans over 200 years – and 1 Poultry. The buildings at Bank are symmetrical about an apex directed towards the junction: they have symmetrical facades facing on the street, and these axial arrangements and symmetrical forms are referenced by Stirling in his new design for 1 Poultry. In terms of height, the majority of the surrounding buildings were approx. 8 storeys. In response, Stirling's building was designed with two levels of retail, five of office and a roof garden.

Stirling also pointed out that the buildings at Bank were of monumental scale with strongly articulated stonework (Bank of England), huge classical columns (Mansion House) and strongly expressed parapet lines. This gave the buildings a weighty presence, and in turn Stirling also relied on stonework and articulated courses and a large scale of architectural elements. "The proposed building will be one of a group of monumental buildings around Bank. Its dialogue to its neighbours is an essential consideration." (Paragraphs 3.9 and 3.14, Public Inquiry Proof of Evidence, James Stirling, 1988).

## **Design**

### ***Geometry***

Stirling's Geometric rationale was critical to the design of this building. Stirling had a complete set of fully worked up drawings of the building which he used to successfully describe his designs at the

planning inquiries in the 1990s. The design detail was scrutinised Public Inquiry Inspector – and in his assessment of the scheme, the Inspector described the “precise” design as offering “a play of forms that was inventive with a refreshing wit...” It states:

*“In this case the basis for the design was a careful analysis of the surroundings and history of the area along with the technical requirements of function and servicing for the 1990s and beyond. Many of those requirements were specific, even scientific in their precision and had implications on the geometry of the proposals – for example the structure and servicing grid was on a 3: 1 plan module dictated by those requirements and by the triangular site. The design was precise as a whole and its relationship of the component parts. There were specific dimensional relationships between elements in plan, section and elevation; the building was not an ad hoc assemblage of forms.*

*The principles of design could be set out as follows:*

- *The central axis (found in all buildings at Bank) established the symmetrical plan*
- *The edges of the site defined the grid and the 3:1 ratio plan module of the whole building*
- *The grid was turned to meet the facades at right angles, which in turn established a relationship between height and width of the floor to ceiling module (3m), and the plan module, 1.5m.*
- *The courtyard was positioned into the triangle like a ball in a funnel. A centre line of the triangle was then drawn through the centre of the court and turned at the circumference to meet the facades at right angles (para 5.57, case for the appellants, Inspector’s report, Public Inquiry, 1998).*

The report continues:

*“The designed offered a play of forms that was inventive with a refreshing wit that was scholarly in its references, just beneath the surface, to classical precedent. There was no overt aping of classical features but a fundamental structure that was classical. It recalled Lutyens’ phrase concerning the ‘high game’ of architecture (used in the context of the free development of renaissance classicism) and employed with wit and inventiveness in the design of the Midland Bank Head Office, opposite the appeal site. The note was passed from generation to generation in the wide range of the highly important and monumental group of buildings at the height of the City from Wren and Hawksmoor and Dance to Soane and thence to Lutyens and from him to Stirling. That was a truly imaginative interpretation of the task of preserving and extending the historic nature of the site.” (paragraph 5.59 case for the appellants, Inspector’s report, Public Inquiry, 1998).*

In his conclusion, the Inspector notes: *“It is my assessment that the appeal proposals, by their dignified order, their imaginative ingenuity and pervading overall consistency, would contribute more both to the immediate environment and to the architectural heritage than the retention of the existing buildings. The new building would to my mind be of substantial importance for the present age... To suggest that a building by James Stirling would be acceptable elsewhere in the city but not here, would in my opinion be to miss once again that vital opportunity. The loss would be all the greater because it would be of a considered mature work by a British architect of international stature of whose achievements the nation can be justly proud.” (para 14.29)*

*“As I have already noted the design for the appeal site clearly follows a symmetrical ordered structure that is in my view appropriate for its location. Its expression derives from a thoroughly modern approach to meeting functional requirements, but developed into an almost abstract grammar much as Lutyens developed the “high game” of renaissance classicism... What is in my opinion singularly impressive about the coherence of this design is the way in which the central unifying feature - the drum – is pre-echoed in the curves of the ground floor shop fronts and of parts of the office floors, even extending down into the two topmost office floors themselves....if the drum were to prove anything like the successful public attraction of the drum at Neue Staatsgalerie in Stuttgart it would serve its purpose well.” (14.55, Conclusions Inspector’s report, Public Inquiry 1998)*

*“If the drum and the symmetry are accepted the other parts of the design fall into place, including the controversial apex tower, the central way through, the shopping concourse and the colonnades – which I find welcoming features rather than the revers. ...Taken overall, as far as the public domain is concerned, I would say the design has strong consistency and character and is one which would be a worthy modern addition to the architectural fabric of the City. It might just be a masterpiece.” (para 14.57)*

### **Facades and central drum**

The design for 1 Poultry is planned around a central longitudinal axis with similar facades to Queen Victoria Street and Poultry. As outlined above, the parapet height and vertical division of the facades of 1 Poultry into distinct parts also correspond to the surrounding buildings. A pedestrian passage throughout the buildings links an open circular court to shopping colonnades on the Poultry and Queen Victoria Street frontages.

At ground level the court also connects with the concourse level shopping and the tube station below as well as views up to the roof-garden. The design intention was to offer visual connectivity and thus legibility to pedestrians in the pass-through drum. The court is circular at ground and first floor levels and interlocks with a triangular plan for the upper office floors, bringing light and views of the sky into the centre of the building. Stirling said “It has to rain all the way through”, it referenced medieval passages through the City that open up into spaces. The intention was that people would use the space, that it would not be sterile. Public access to the offices is from the court, while the ceremonial entrance at the prow contains the grand stair leading to the first floor balcony around the central court. While the two principal street elevations establish a strong urban presence with their proximity to the adjacent historic buildings, the third elevation is rendered, as if the stone cladding had been stripped back, creating a suitably informal aspect. The principal elevations and the corner tower are clad in bands of red and cream sandstone – respectively Wilderness Red (from the Midlands) and beige Australian Helidon with a solid bronze finish for metal work - window, shop fronts, handrails, flagpole on Poultry and Queen Victoria Street. The stone forms an opened jointed rain screen with insulation behind. Laurence Bain told us that he chose the final stone for the cladding facades: “Jim had specified that he wanted it faced in sandstone – he always said he was interested in a ‘lively’ stone for the cladding. With Arup Façade Engineering, we searched for the liveliest we could find. The Wilderness Red from the Midlands was more expensive than the Australian stone!”. Rosa Gallura granite is used for a bullnose band, and as paving and cladding on the roof garden and in the lift lobbies. The exterior walls rise above roof level to enclose a large formal roof garden, terrace and restaurant. The roof garden, designed with Arabella Lennox-Boyd, comprises a circular garden with oak pergola, used by the restaurant, and a formal garden on the prow.

At the apex is what Sandy Wilson describes as the rostral column, boldly set above a ‘modern’ glazed prow and the void of the formal entrance. Internally, this ceremonial grand stair rises uninterrupted from the street entrance at the prow to the first floor balcony surrounding the drum. The contour-line banding of the masonry in the walls and vault contrasts with the inclined treads and ramp of the stairway. At upper level the masonry panels appear to pivot, allowing light to enter from the adjacent offices. Bain told us that Stirling was particularly interested in the way people experienced space, light and colour as they entered a building – this is a repeated theme in many of the office’s designs – Stuttgart, Tate Modern, British Embassy Berlin. The apex entrance was about presence at Bank Junction (corporate image): from the entrance the grand stair slowly rises and opens out to the first floor drum. The first floor drum, with its curved banded stone, is a contained space without windows. When asked why there are no windows, Bain replied that the office space (on the other side of the rotunda wall) is circulation space and that windows would result in the circular rotunda bleeding and thus lacking clear circular definition.

Bain told us that many consider that the decision by the previous owner of the building to close the apex entrance was very poor management. This entrance was never intended as a primary entrance it contributes to the prestigious image of the building. The apex entrance frequently appears in the media and advertising and as such should be valued and opened for access.

The offices were designed within the constraints of the triangular site to be open plan and fully flexible – in order to accommodate large dealing spaces. The original ceiling tiles (which are all still in situ) were designed to fit with the geometric grid pattern so that partitions could be slotted in and fit precisely with the 3:1 ratio plan module.

The lift lobbies have granite facings to the walls and ceiling and the inclined walls mirror those of the main openings on the street facades.

### **Architectural success and critical acclaim**

1 Poultry has divided opinion since it was built. Some commentators claim the scale and playful architectural language is out of place with its neighbours, and that due to the planning battles and delays in construction not only was the style out of fashion when it was built, but it was constructed after his death and not personally overseen by him. However, the drawings were complete by the time of the Public Inquiry and any fair comparison between the drawings and the building we see today will confirm that it was faithfully constructed by the JSMWAL office. And there was extensive praise in many of the contemporary write ups after completion. Writing in the Architect's Journal, Robert Maxwell commented:

*"The city of London has against all odds almost certainly obtained a masterpiece...This is a city building, exaggeratedly dressed in stone and rich in compositional plays, taking its place in a collection of rule bound buildings; contextual too, in responding to a neighbourhood of triangular sites. ... The mood is irreverent, not respectful. There is a gleeful enjoyment of observing the rules and at the same time sending them up. At one level the building stands for the common citizen taking over the privileged realm of business..."*

*"For the architect it is an object lesson in the shoe horning of separate functions into a tight space. The core cylinder is invaded by triangles of office accommodation so that the requisite office area is obtained without sacrificing the geometry. The triangular wells that open the basement to the view of the sky follow an exactly alternating pattern. The entrances occur at significant points, without obstructing the sense of public space. The VIP entrance at the 'prow' is there and not-there until required, and the amazing tunnel that links it to the upper piazza is an essay in pure architecturality, passing through 'contours' that decorate its vault without introducing a single arbitrary note..."*

*... For all its cheekiness, it is a serious piece of architecture. It holds up superbly in a confluence of famous buildings by Lutyens, Cooper, Dance and Soane, a City building at a meeting of City streets, modern, classical and romantic all at once." Robert Maxwell, Architect's Journal November 1998.*

Architect Piers Gough remarked on the "fabulous baroque flamboyance" of the building. He said, *"Where most architects would be please enough to express the triangular corner plan, he adds a great circular contrapuntal drum in the centre as the expression of a small circular light well while the external walls are made restless with alternating arcades, angled bays, pieces of cornice and a midrift roll of sumo proportions...if modernism was an idea of shoeing the complexity of architecture based on context and history as well as function and technical developments, then the past 20 years has shown that complexity is easy to get into but much harder to come out of with resolved elegance. Stirling's greatness was an ability to assimilate more and more influences in his life and carry them into resolved compositions. It is an indictment that this should be his only large building in London."* Piers Gough, RIBA Journal, 1997.

Architectural journal 'Building' described the newly constructed form and geometry of the building and how it related very closely to its neighbouring context. *"It takes the form of a large wedge of ripe cheese that has had a beer glass with a Toblerone in it pushed down through its top, so the surfaces*

on the external vertical edges have burst. The exterior is dressed with reasonable decorum in salmon and grey striped granite and has dramatic raked openings of improbable thickness. In contrast, the open shaft inside the drum is faced largely in black vitreous tiles, sparkling with sculpted window openings tricked out in astonishing blues, yellows and pinks. The main office entrance is by a grand, deep staircase accessed through a revolving door in a tall arch and pointed glazing at the apex. Above this is a formidably robust tower with a massive clock, whose central motor hovers at the centre of a sheet of plate glass that surrounds it. This provides a bizarre circular window to the boardroom, behind which must be the most amazing view in the Square Mile.

The nose of this great ship sits under a conning platform that straddles a striped tower with a vestigial, but still enormous baroque stone cornice beyond it. The sides loom outwards over the street in colossal stone segmental radii with angled plate-glass windows above. The whole operation is an astonishing piece of controlled geometry. It is an extraordinarily confident piece of design. The building sits on the site like a boxer defending his corner. At first sight, it appears to bear no relation to anything around it, although it does not take long to realise that it has been designed for this site, with these neighbours, by an architect who know exactly what was required to provide a building in this company". Building, October 1997.

Architect of the British Library Sir Colin St John Wilson, who worked with Stirling at the LCC early in their careers, wrote an in-depth review of the building for Architecture Today. "When it comes to the subjective impression made by the physical presence of the building, there is no doubt that order instantly establishes itself as the prevailing aura. But this is quickly overtaken by the more personal clues of a language experienced in terms of touch (both rough and smooth), scale, colour, degrees of envelopment or exposure to the side or from above and the gradation of ascending and descending routes. We are engaged at a level of great richness and variety, full of grace notes.

In terms of public urban amenity the building offers a number of gains over the previous condition. In place of the rather mean street frontages and crowded point of descent to the Underground, there is now a central rotunda courtyard, opening down via escalators to a lower concourse of shops leading to the Underground; this courtyard also forms a comfortable short cut between Poultry and Queen Victoria Street.

There is also a direct entrance to the offices at first floor level, by means of a striking stairway ascending from the entrance at the prow to the open gallery around the courtyard. Finally at roof level there is a beautiful circular garden or 'hortus inclusus', with access to the restaurant and a formal parterre leading to the viewing platform topping the rostral column. At this point we encounter one of the most daring features of Stirling's architecture: the humour that punctuates any false pretension that the 'high game' might bring. For here is the set piece of roof garden with its cannonballs and marching echelons of cut hedge recalls nothing so much as the world of David Hockney's stage-set 'the Magic flute'. In combination with the stunning view of the roof-tops of the city there is a tour de force of great delight." Architecture Today, September 1998, Colin St John Wilson pp 52-73.

Pevsner (1997) praises the intelligent expression of its interior volumes. More recent commentary also comments on the form and colour of 1 Poultry, and its engagement with its surrounding context: "As No.1 Poultry bursts into view like a peachy rainbow as you drive up Cornhill, we see Stirling's fully-ripe combination of the same historico-cultural condition. It's still a strange thing to look at, almost ridiculous in its colour and verging on cartoon in its formalism, the building's apparent dumbness bristles with interlocking denseness and determined engagement with its urban context. Its combination of stupidity and obviousness with intelligence and spatial complexity makes the architecture that surrounds it – both context and contemporaneous – seem dumber, meaner and duller" Situating Stirling, Five viewpoints, Architectural Review, 30 March 2011.

## Conclusion

1 Poultry is a controversial building because of its flamboyant and apparently irreverent style, as well as the lengthy conservation battles over its construction. The choice of materials, the careful reference to its historic context and the precise geometrical interplays throughout this building make it stand out as a remarkable, confident work for its time. In our view it is one of Stirling's most significant works, and it is the most important example of finely designed 'post-modern' architecture in England. 1 Poultry is today much as Stirling intended. It was fully let on completion and remains fully let, and the main tenant has occupied the building since it opened – a resounding testament to its success.

The Twentieth Century Society considers 1 Poultry to be a highly significant and late example of James Stirling's work. With its public roof-garden, pass through, courtyard, colonnades and links to Bank station, it is an example of the City planners late 20th Century ambitions to construct commercial buildings that engaged with and are accessible to the public. In our view, the planning controversy over the previous buildings on the site has influenced judgement on the replacement building, and that now it time to re-appraise the clear qualities and success of this monumental building. We urge Historic England to give this building and its architect the recognition it deserves, and to recommend listing at grade II\*.

### **The Architect**

Sir James Stirling (22 April 1926 – 25 June 1992) was the principal and founder of the firm James Stirling Michael Wilford and Associates. He became a registered architect in 1952 and won the Alvar Aalto Award in 1977, the RIBA Gold Medal in 1980, the Pritzker Prize in 1981, and the Japanese culture prize 'Praemium Imperiale', in 1990. The Stirling Prize, the UK's most prestigious architecture prize, is named after James Stirling.

Stirling was an associate of the Royal Academy and taught and lectured in different parts of the world including Yale University and at the Kunstakademie in Dusseldorf, Germany.

Stirling worked in partnership with James Gowan from 1956 to 1963, then with Michael Wilford from 1971 until 1992.

- Notable Buildings: 1958 London: Flats at Ham Common (with James Gowan)
- 1959 Leicester University: Faculty of Engineering (with James Gowan) (Grade II\*)
- 1961 London: Camberwell School Assembly Hall
- 1964 St Andrews University: Andrew Melville Hall of Residence
- 1968 Cambridge University: Faculty of History (Grade II)
- 1971 Oxford University: The Queen's College, Florey Building (Grade II)
- 1972 Haslemere, Surrey: Training Centre for Olivetti (extension)
- 1976 Runcorn: Southgate social housing (demolished)
- 1984 Stuttgart: Neue Staatsgalerie
- 1984 Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University, Fogg Museum Sackler Galleries (extension)
- 1987 Berlin: Wissenschaftszentrum (Social Science Research campus)
- 1987 London: Tate Britain, Clore Galleries (extension)
- 1989 Paris: Bibliothèque de France (unsuccessful competition entry)
- 1997 London: offices and retail at No 1 Poultry, London EC3