

Figure 4.12 Lloyds Building, London, designed by Richard Rogers



Thatcher and Major governments, a liberal *laissez-faire* philosophy has encouraged a more commercial approach where the height and bulk of buildings in a given location is determined to some extent by market forces.

The outcome of developmental pressures, particularly over the last 30 or 40 years, has been a reordering of skyline priorities. The hegemony of St Paul's has been successfully challenged. Post-war office structures have crowded the presence of St

Paul's and though still evident, due to its unique shape, the Cathedral no longer dominates its setting as it once did. There is, however, a powerful conservationist lobby, orchestrated by HRH Prince Charles, which laments the passing of the original Wren townscape. Others believe such a viewpoint is idealist, even utopian. Change, those holding this view insist, is inexorable: 'For the Prince to presume he can go back to the seventeenth century city of spires dominating three to four-storey brick buildings is a regression in economic terms. We don't live in a Christian society dominated by the church, we live in a mercantile culture' (Jencks, 1990). If, however, the problems associated with finite resources, the effect of pollution on climate and world food shortages apply strict limits to growth then the search for more sustainable city forms will prove inescapable. In such circumstances urban forms similar to those advocated by HRH Prince Charles will not be utopian but necessary for the survival of city life (see Brundtland, 1987).

The changed skyline around St Paul's has been gradual and incremental. Although such developments have to be judged against the values, exigencies and imperatives of the period, they must also be judged against the universal principles of good design. The city of London is no longer a cathedral town. It is now an international commercial and financial centre. Should not, therefore, the skyline of the city reflect these important functions? Recognizing that urban areas are dynamic entities, not fixed once and for ever, does not invalidate the thesis presented here that each increment of development should be a positive attempt to decorate the city. Judged from this viewpoint, the development around St Paul's cannot be considered an elegant enhancement of the city skyline. The earlier decoration of the skyline was by shapes of an elegant form such as domes, needle thin minarets and finely tiered steeples. The modern skyline has been bludgeoned by dumb boxes and ungainly squat slab blocks. If the new office towers had been as distinctive and as distinguished as the older dome



they may have been acceptable. The Lloyds Building designed by Richard Rogers illustrates what may have been. Unlike the Lloyds Building, the vast majority of new tall City buildings exhibit little concern for their role as ornaments on the City's skyline (Figures 4.12 and 4.13).

THE SKYLINE: COMPETITION OR CONTROL

A crucial question for urban design is the extent to which our city skylines should change as social, economic, technological and political factors change. The retention of a historic skyline by the conscious exercise of legislative and administrative control is common in European countries and also in Washington DC. Thus the decoration of the skyline is controlled by a public agency acting ostensibly in the public interest. Cities which have tried to control their skyline by use of an overall height restriction usually aim to maintain an established and historic hierarchy of building heights. The tide of change can be resisted by regulation,

planning and prohibition, but not always with success: 'St Paul's has not been lost, but its visual and symbolic impact have been contained and limited. The new role is very different from the old one. Its visual domination of its immediate environs is for the most part guaranteed through legislation and vigilance, and through recognition of its strategic role in London's tourism industry. But from greater distances - when it can be seen - it will be significant not for its massive presence, but for the contrast its shape makes with tower blocks nearby. St Paul's is no longer the symbol of the City, but the clue that this is London, and not someplace else' (Attoe, 1981). As in Paris, it is possible to maintain heights and densities by means of building and planning codes but given increasing development pressure such codes become increasingly difficult to enforce.

Explicit controls to retain the historic skyline of cities has been more a feature of European than of American cities. Washington DC is the one American exception: 'It is the nation's horizontal city, thanks to an unrepealed Act of 1910 which set

Figure 4.13 St Paul's Cathedral and the City of London