

How to Make Archway Tower Disappear

Ruth Ewan

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In April 2012 a viewer was temporarily installed on Holloway Road near the corner of St John's Grove in Archway, London. The viewer is fixed in position and resembles the sort one would normally find at the end of a seaside pier. When you look through it you can see the real world, that is, you can see cars, buses and people go by. Looking northwest up Holloway Road towards Archway Tube Station you see that Archway Tower has disappeared.

How to Make Archway Tower Disappear is a temporary publicly sited project by artist Ruth Ewan. The project consists of two elements: the viewer, and an accompanying artist's book containing a collection of articles and images relating to Archway Tower.

How to Make Archway Tower Disappear is the fourth artwork in the Alight series commissioned by AIR in partnership with London Borough of Islington. AIR is a commissioning and research studio at Central Saint Martins College of Arts & Design, University of the Arts London, exploring the relationship between artist and place.



AIR Archive
Archway Tower 2012

Preface

I'm not someone who has a particular interest in buildings. I do however like the way people view or remember particular places, unlikely places, sites which amass invisible clusters of meanings. Archway Tower is one of those places. Stories, histories, songs, superstitions, rituals and beliefs, from aesthetic admiration to societal rage, cling to its impenetrable amourclad exterior, transferring around the mouths and minds of Archway and beyond.

Archway has proved to be very fertile ground for many artists, of which I am one. In many ways this project was alive before I came along; I joined together two already existing enthusiasms. I met a gentleman called Fang, a resident of Archway, in June 2007 when he was busking on London's Southbank. In February 2008 I undertook a residency at Byam Shaw School of Art, during which I developed a project called 'Fang Sang' with him. At this same time I met Anna Hart, host to my residency, and something of an Archway Tower obsessive. As the guardian of a bulging ring-bound dossier, collected from local history centres and years of student and artist research on the tower, it was hard not to be infected by her interest.

During the process of producing 'Fang Sang' I asked Fang what he thought of the tower. He told me tales of woe, some dating back to the 1980s when the building was host to North London's Department of Social Security office. I asked him if we could do something with the tower. He said he'd think about it. A few days later he came back to me saying:

I think it would be a good present to the people of Islington if we could make the Tower disappear.

He said it would be quite straightforward, like when magician David Copperfield disappeared the Statue of Liberty. Seemed possible to me. All we needed was a rotating platform, several spotlights, helicopters, a TV channel and crew, a small live audience and perhaps some cash to pay them off. Great idea I thought, but unlikely to happen.

Forward nearly four years, I still see Fang from time to time. Last November I sent him a text message:

Do you still want to make Archway Tower disappear?

He replies within seconds:

Of course. What have you got, mirrors or semtex?

Truthfully, I have neither. But having consulted architects, magicians, sceneographers and software designers I think I have figured out, for a fleeting moment, how to make Archway Tower disappear.

Ruth Ewan
April 2012



B. S. Williams Plant Catalogue
*Mexican Orchid House in the Victoria &
Paradise Nurseries 1888*
© The Board of Trustees of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

Foreword

Another artist told me that when she rather abruptly left home as a teenager she ended up in a bedsit in Archway. Recently returning after a long absence she felt disorientated but subsequently realised that this was because the Archway Tower had not previously been there. I was particularly touched by this story as she had arrived the month I was born, and I had not previously positioned the tower's absence in my own timeline.

Ewan's new work locates the tower for all of us, as a presence and absence, as well as locating a length of time, the time of a place, and the place of our time. How can it, or might it, reappear after this disappearance? Does the very (magic) absence of the tower allow a (magic) presence of jam, orchids and films¹, or something else?

The tower, and its site, mark time for us in Archway. The tower itself is new, but not very new, and certainly not old enough to encourage any familiarity that might soften some edges (conversely the nose of Dick Whittington's stone cat just up the hill is rubbed smooth from tender stroking). It lacks both architectural kindness, and, through a twist of fate, has contained of lack of social kindness.

How to Make Archway Tower Disappear comes at the beginning of yet another indefinite period of emptiness for the tower. An artist 'cannot work miracles'² but Ewan's spotlight on the tower's histories and qualities accrues a collective emphasis on the predicament of the emptiness. This book shuffles the nostalgic, the pragmatic, and the brutal. It cannot be used as its title implies, as an instruction manual. But this disappearance is a quietly remarkable thing. It asserts a space in a moment of our everyday to gasp, rekindle our desires... and continue on with our timelines.

Anna Hart
AIR Organiser
April 2012

¹ recalling Victoria & Paradise Nurseries, Chivers Jam distribution warehouse and the Electric Theatre, previously on this site – see timeline on page 39.

² to quote Alister Warman, former principal of Byam Shaw and chief collaborator in instigating AIR.

Archway's face of the future

The shape of things to come at Archway. This 17-storey office skyscraper will soon be rising next to Archway Station to complete the second phase of the Archway Development by Star (Great Britain) Holdings Ltd.

The picture is an artist's impression of how the complex of offices and shops will look when finished. Archway Station is to the left of the new building and Blue Star House is in the background.

Work has now been started on this second phase of the development by Holland, Hannen and Cubitts (Southern) Ltd., who have been awarded the £1.6 million contract by Star.

When it is completed in March 1974, the building will provide approximately 70,400 square feet of high quality office space and will form the final link to the pedestrian shopping precinct constructed in phase one of the development.

The building will be of reinforced concrete frame construction, with aluminium and glass exterior curtain walling and storey-height precast concrete cladding panels on the flanks of the block. The offices will be air-conditioned throughout and the ground floor will contain an entrance to the station.

A 17-storey spine will provide lifts, toilets and services for two flanking sections of 15 and 16 storeys, with plant rooms in the top storey of the spine structure and in the basement.

With the Archway Road widening already underway, the rebuilding of Whittington Hospital set and major housing developments being undertaken nearby by Islington Council in the Girdlestone Road area and by the Greater London Council in the Elthorne Road area, the Archway area will soon be barely recognisable.



Archway's face of the future
Islington Gazette 1972
Courtesy Islington Local History Centre



Unknown Photographer
Aerial View of Archway 1934
Courtesy Archway Methodist Church

Fang, Archway resident

Archway Tower, I mean, oh god... what it symbolises now and what it used to symbolise is... hell on earth. For anyone who used to have to go there to sort out their benefits and what have you, it used to be a nightmare building. It always has been a nightmare building, both inside and out. Outside because of its position, you get a vortex of wind around the base that is so horrific. I've seen little old ladies with shopping trolleys literally thrown up in the air and spun round and into the road. It's an eyesore. Inside it always was a hellhole. There seemed to be no holes barred - they used to have security staff in there. I'd been there to pick up emergency payments and there's been families in there that have gone there with their kids and you see them in the waiting room and they'd set up primus stoves and they're cooking soup in the waiting room for their kids!

But it was, and still is, an eyesore, even though its been taken over by other people, unfortunately. It is a much-hated building. Ironically, had it not been used for those purposes and maybe in a slightly different location, it's quite an attractive

building. But it's in the wrong location, a bit like Centre Point in a way.

I think it would be really nice, a lovely present for the people of Islington, if you could make it disappear for a while.... which is quite easy to do, from certain viewpoints, there are certain illusions that can be applied to it where it would be very easy to make it actually disappear, for a little while, from one particular vantage point. It's all done with mirrors my love. And, as a project, I wouldn't mind having a crack at it myself...

I can't go into detail about the best ways of doing it because I'd be breaking certain regulations of the Magic Circle. There is a well-known illusion that can be applied that can make it disappear, apparently, off the face of the earth, which wouldn't just make it disappear but you'd be able to see what's behind it with moving clouds and everything.

Asier Mendizabal, artist

I landed in London via Archway really. The reason I went to London was in 1995 I went to the Byam Shaw School of Art, just around the corner from the tower. That was my first contact, a short period, about three months. Then I came back to London the year after for a longer period of about a year, and again I stayed in Archway. So my first recollection of London is that strange, sort of impersonal area of Archway. It's quite funny actually.

The tower... to me it was not a remarkable presence, it didn't seem that different from the generic architecture of the time that I knew already in Spain. I know that in the landscape of London it could be seen as a prominent presence, I guess it was not so much for me. I came to learn that it was one of these uncomfortable sort of sites, but it took me a while to understand that. It was this very symptomatic anxiety that London seems to have with architecture - not in terms of right or wrong urbanism, which is a completely legitimate sort of anxiety in cities, but in what I think is more related to a symbolic relationship with the block. There seems to be

a whole imaginary, sort of floating thing, about what the tower is, and I felt after some time, especially in the school, because of how often the tower was referred to, that the fact that it was this block, this tower, was always felt as a sort of intrusive presence.

There seems to be a suspicion of towers. Archway Tower is not a good example for that because it's not a residential tower, it's not an estate, it's not one of these social housing projects, it's more like an office, a corporate base. But from a debate that is previously there, I guess in the time from the 70s to the 80s, when housing blocks became a symptom of everything that is wrong in the social contract, an idea of welfare basically, there is a shift, which is an economical shift after all, to start promoting private ownership of houses as a sort of priority, to change the social fabric. I think the tower, as a typology, starts embodying this symbol of everything that is 'failed' in a certain political or economical project, and I think this was damned, the public perception of this typology of architecture. So from the outside, I get the impression that

towers, blocks, ended up embodying some sort of failure, recognition of failure of the project, and a sort of hurry to embrace a whole new idea of how space has to be shared. Even though the social and economic reasons for that probably have changed dramatically since then, even though probably now tower blocks are not perceived as such a 'hell', or shit holes as they used to be perceived some time ago, the general perception is that it is always intrusive. It's an alienating way of building, and it's an intrusion in a literally and figuratively horizontal idea of community, so there's a metaphor working there.

I guess it's the perception that I've been building up over time. That's the other thing, we elaborate memories to make sense out of them. I probably was not that aware when I was there, but then again, I was always very aware that it was always extremely windy around the tower. It was only later that I found out that this was some sort of a local cliché, and everybody understood and knew that it was the tower that diverted these winds to make it this really apocalyptic vortex that sometimes

you would find coming out of the tube. But again, this is an elaboration of memory. However, I never linked it to the weird atmosphere that there always seemed to be at that corner of the building.

It's only something that I found out afterwards. It's the way in which we reconstruct memories of places in time and we're exchanging what we know about the spaces with what we remember about the spaces.

Mark Piggot, Archway resident

I first visited London in 1983 and I came to Archway. I liked the surrounding area but I didn't like Archway itself, someone said to me 'I think lots of people must have been massacred in Archway, it's got a really awful feeling about it, a sort of gloomy feeling'. I sort of agreed with that but then I was walking with some friends past the tower one day and they stopped to talk to the security guard, and they obviously knew him, and this blew me away. I didn't realise that in London you could get to this point where you would actually see people you knew on a regular basis. It sounds crazy now but I was only about sixteen. I started to think of the tower as being quite a friendly place although it looks quite ominous. It reminds me of Darth Vader. I was looking at images online today and I thought there's not much similarity. But I always think of it in those terms, a sort of tall, dark, brooding presence that's always there.

I've been in this area about twenty-seven years now and nearly everywhere I've lived I've been able to see the tower. It's quite an iconic presence on my horizon. I associated it first with community, with the idea that you could live in London and still pass the time of day with people and know people. In the 80s it was where I used to sign on. I was squatting in the middle of Elthorne Estate where there was a condemned row of houses. It was a mad place and we lived there for years. We used to all sign on there, I think it was on the eleventh floor, and the view, because you're looking across London and you're on a hill anyway, is incredible - they should really do more with it. But I have mixed memories. It was quite a grim place to sign on, there was thick reinforced glass on the windows, they had all sorts of people going mad in there and stuff, so again it started to seem like quite a negative sort of place.

Living in Elthorne there were quite a lot of subways then and you could get more or less from Archway Tower and the tube all the way back to our squat in these tunnels, most of which

have been blocked off now. A lot of people found it quite scary, when I brought guests back they were like 'this is awful', but we loved it, this was home, we didn't have any problems there. I started to drink in a pub which was built just beneath it, which became a library later. That was a really grim pub. When we were on the dole we'd sign on and then we'd go and sit in there and it just felt really depressing, but in a way you felt quite at home because everyone was in the same position. And we used to drink in the Archway Tavern; in the 80s this was still a very Irish area, now it's a lot more mixed. So you'd be walking home up Holloway Road, you'd see the tower in the distance, and all the blokes would be coming out of the Gresham Ballroom, and girls, and there was all sorts of drinking and fighting and there was a real Irish feel in the area, especially the tavern.

The tower's always been there in the background. I've lived in Tufnell Park, I lived at Highbury, even from there you can see it because it's right up the top end. I've lived around Junction Road over the last thirteen years and I feel like it's just been a constant part of my background. I think now, again, my feelings have shifted and I'm quite fond of it again, it feels like home. If I'm on Hampstead Heath or Parliament Hill or something I can see it in the distance, I know I can just head for that and I'm home. If you come back in from the North as well, it's when you see Archway Tower you know that you're back in proper London, I don't see the suburbs as London. Once you see Archway Tower you know you're back in the real city. It's very close to where all the Dick Whittington tales come from as well so it's all linked in my mind. The pub and the cat and the stone and the tower, they're all part of the same thing, coming back to London.

Sometimes I used to want to leave, in the early days, and I'd get up the hill and think no, I'm being called back. It was partly the non-existent bells

but partly seeing the tower, I thought if 'I can make it here I can make it anywhere'.

I used to write about it quite a lot and in my first book, which was published a few years ago, the guy keeps traveling from the Archway to the Angel on buses. Archway has always been seen as the rough part of the borough, whereas the southern end, the Angel, was seen as the posh end. There was an article in the Guardian in the 80s, I think it was called 'Where angels fear to tread' and it was all about where we lived, it was about Holloway Road and stuff, and the Mother Red Cap, and it was basically saying this is a very rough area, don't live here. We tried to write an alternative one saying 'Actually it's not that bad, we live here'. In my book, the main character lives in a poor part of Archway but he wants to live in the Angel, so he's constantly going backwards and forwards. I sort of developed that, that he wanted to kill himself so he goes up to Suicide Bridge, and that's another archway as well, and he's saved by an angel. That's why I called this section of the book 'The Archway and the Angel', which I quite liked because it works on about three different levels. Then I wrote a short story in which someone actually explodes the Archway Tower and it falls onto the Archway Tavern. That was published just before 7/7 and a lot of people said 'How could you write about terrorism in such a funny way?' and I had to say 'No I actually wrote it just before', so I was a little bit worried about that at the time.

I wrote a couple of poems about it as well. Several relationship break-ups happened within the shadow of the tower at the tube station, I remember saying goodbye to someone, 'Archway Tower towered high I turned away and wiped my eye...', I mean pretty bad poetry! But it was always there. All these relationships coming and going and it was always somehow there in the background.



Bede Geoghegan Hart
Darth Vader 2012



Topical Press 1930
 Reconstruction of Highgate (now Archway) tube station
 © Transport for London, courtesy
 The London Transport Museum



Photographer unknown
 7 – 15 Highgate Hill, before Archway Tower 1964
 Courtesy Islington Local History Centre

Alister Warman, Principal, Byam Shaw School of Art 1991- 2011

People had to queue very publicly to claim their benefits, round past the tube station. The general feeling was this was pretty undignified. In the 70s and the 80s quite a few artists would sign on there, this was the last bad recession, I guess I'm talking early 80s. Michael Bichard, former Rector of University of the Arts, was a civil servant in the Department of Employment and was responsible for moving the benefits office out of the tower.

There was then a block on the Highgate Road which was up for development, for a while there was some cheap housing which was settled by artists. That partly accounted for the number of artists there who needed to sign on.

I looked out at the Tower, daily, for most of the twenty years that I worked at Byam Shaw. And in a perverse way became rather fond of it. Despite all the calumnies thrown at it, it had marvelous obduracy; it sort of just seemed to be able to defy every attempt to pull it down. And as many people have said, it's not a bad building, it just happens to be sited

inappropriately. It really has quite a presence in the whole locality. It actually conditions the whole feel of Archway. From Hampstead Heath it can look fairly inconsequential but it's still there as a landmark. In fact it was walking on the heath that prompted me to think of a project to ask one hundred artists to respond to the Archway Tower, with Hokusai's One hundred views of Mount Fuji in mind. I thought that might be a centenary idea for Byam Shaw but, quite apart from the logistical tasks of working with one hundred artists, it rather looked at that point as if Byam Shaw was not even going to get to one hundred so I abandoned the motion. Whenever I was daydreaming or distracted I would look up at this black monolith that, so to speak, became a familiar and friend.

It's a popular perch for crows, they feel very comfortable up there providing the wind is not blowing too hard. And in the spring, in fact about now, in February, March and into April, sparrowhawks seem to do their nuptial flights above the tower using currents of air. There seem to be

updraughts of air that attract them to do their display flight. So I would watch out for that about this time of year. And also, as far as I can see, cormorants seem to use it as a marker for commuting from the Walthamstow Marshes to Hampstead Heath ponds. It must be a flight path for them. I guess if you're flying up from Walthamstow as a cormorant it's quite a prominent building.

I've been inside the tower and the views are superb, and it's a shame that so few people in Archway have a chance to experience the positives of the building. Given that it's where Dick Whittington supposedly turned again, I'm occasionally reminded of its historical importance, of the Holloway Road and the Angel and the A1. This is where you set out for Yorkshire and Scotland and the North. Rather more could be made of that I think. I always think of it as where Haringey, Islington and Camden converge, even though geographically, strictly speaking it's a little further, but it's that sort of meeting point.

Archway Market stallholder

I've lived in this area for about three years now. I have a particular interest in architecture and photography. The tower is quite an interesting subject to take; some of the lines, the perspective, particularly at ground level. But I know that the building itself carries a lot of mixed feelings for the community. Not least of all because of its size. I know that when it was built, before my time, there was a lot of controversy about it going up.

Certainly, we've all speculated what the future of the building is. My colleagues and me have often wondered whether it was going to be turned over to the market, or what was going to happen to it. It's unpopularity, I wonder if it's a psychological thing, blackened glass- it's quite strong. Perhaps people feel it's quite oppressive, it sort of juts out, casts a long shadow. You could probably anti-romanticise about it. I've known friends of friends who work there. I think if you were to take it away you'd feel it, a bit like something was missing, in some respects, because it's been here for forty years.

Ruth Underwood, Archway resident

I've lived in the Archway area since 1984. I'm a music teacher and I have a stall of my artwork at the market. Mainly what I remember about the Archway Tower is the wind, the way that it becomes a wind trap. People struggle to walk past in high winds, at different angles to the ground. It really is very windy there. I think a sort of wind tunnel has been formed by the high buildings. I know a lot of people think it's an eyesore, and I suppose it is really, but it might seem like something was missing if it wasn't there any more.

It might be quite nice if there was a big mural around it with pictures of sky and clouds and things like that. I don't know what it is used for now. It used to be the Department of Health and Social Security office.

If the building made a sound it might be punk rock sort of music, or a kind of tiddly-pom Cockney tune. It would be quite interesting to play music up on the top of the tower, or within the building. I expect there are some echo chambers in there, the stairwells perhaps. I presume there are stairs that go right from the bottom to the top, so it would be

echo-ey and very sort of avant-garde perhaps. I think it was probably built in the 60s so it could be experimental, existential, an abstract kind of music.



Dave Sinclair
Archway Tower DHSS c1985

**Justin Sullivan, musician,
New Model Army**

In the late 1970s I was living in Bradford, myself and a whole host of other people who went on to become quite successful artists, poets, novelists, fashion designers and all sorts of stuff. We all lived in a big house together. Like all arty young people we didn't have any money. In the early Thatcher years, there was high unemployment especially in the north because that's where all the traditional industries closed down. In Bradford in particular, the textile industry, which had made the city rich in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, was closed down. We were struggling punk rockers. I'm a southerner by birth but I went north to go to college, didn't like college, dropped out, fell in love with the city, stayed. But we had a fledgling band, New Model Army, which was starting to get known a little bit around the country, and we thought perhaps we needed to be in London. My sister had a flat there and so one night we borrowed a van and left in the middle of the night, where nine of us ended up living on my sister's floor, in Highbury Park.

At the time everybody used the dole because there was no work anywhere, unemployment was a fairly acceptable way of life, all the way from some dodgy punk rockers like us over to Wham! They did their 'in praise of being on the dole' song on *Top of the Pops*. That era was different. Of course, London was flooded with people like us, coming to make our fortunes in the old sort of way, and also fleeing the north because everything was being shut down.

So we were duly dispatched off to Archway Towers, which was the local DSS office or DHSS as it was then. And what I remember particularly was that the staff were instructed to not encourage people like us to stay in London, to try to get us to go back to whatever part of the UK we came from, by withholding, making it difficult, insulting, being absolutely purposefully bloody-minded. Getting your dole from Archway Towers was an absolute ordeal, and deliberately so. We weren't actually on the dole very often, or for very long. We had a modicum of success after a few months, we got signed by EMI and we started our career, which is thankfully still going.

Thatcher went on winning elections, she was able to do this partly because of the accident of the Falklands war which enabled her to get the right wing media onside and to stir up all that stuff she was able to pay for mass unemployment with the bonanza of North Sea oil. It was also the time of the Cold War. Anything which was social, for the benefit of all people, anything which was socialist by principal, had to be shut down and stopped. Britain's never recovered, in my opinion, from that era. New Model Army - we wrote some political songs in our time and still do, but it's not 'Mrs Thatcher is a bitch, lala lala lala'. We tried to approach them from quite interesting angles and Archway Tower struck me as a perfect analogy for that era, hence the song. The first line, 'rolling up ends the babies collected' I remember that, sitting there... everybody smoked in those days, everywhere, so in the waiting room, in which you could wait several

hours, days, I remember one family dispatching their toddler off to pick up dog-ends so they could roll up the remainder of the tobacco and smoke them.

Archway Towers was the closing track on our biggest selling record and a sort of nightmarish closing track. It's strange, it's very obscure in a way. It's a sort of slightly weird, trippy song. Then there's the Tory party conference in the middle. I love that song actually. It's a particular favourite of mine. It's a very weird piece of music that Robert wrote, our ex and late drummer and guitar player and everything, when we were down in Sawmill Studios, the most detached place you could get from Archway Towers. It's a studio in Cornwall that can only be reached by boat on the river Fowey. When the estuary fills up at high tide you get the boat into this little lagoon and you can only get the gear in and out at high tide. It's a fantastic studio. We were down there in the 80s. I had all this stuff written in notepads and on bits of paper, and I realised that the Archway Tower was an absolutely perfect analogy of Thatcher's Britain.

Rolling up tab ends that the baby's collected
Waiting for the number that clicks on the wall.
It's open season on the weak and the feeble
Their meagre ambitions, their impotent fury
There's bullet proof glass in case there is trouble
No doors in the building between this side and that side.

I've tried to wrestle some unbalanced nightmare
Tell myself over that I don't really live here

But the boys run away leaving blood on the pavement
And a little crowd gathered to watch you pick yourself up
Joining the queue at the video library
To watch ninety five minutes of simulated torture

The conference hall rings to the standing ovation
The people in blue ties rise from the podium
Crazy with power, blinded by vision
The mass-chosen leaders for a brutalised nation.

Archway Towers New Model Army 1988
© Heaton/Sullivan, Attack Attack/Warner
Chappell Music Ltd

**Joolz Denby, writer, artist,
tattooist and former member
of New Model Army**

The first thing we noticed when we moved into the area was Archway Tower which stuck up out of the surroundings like Barad-dûr, The Black Tower from Lord of the Rings. We used to think 'Some mad architect has put this hideous block up!' It wasn't the first office that we were signing on at, we first went to Tavistock Square, which was the other really awful place, and then they moved me to Archway Towers. It was notorious. It did physically loom over the landscape. It had an evil reputation and people used to say 'Oh my God, I don't want to go in there, it's dreadful, they treat you like rubbish'. If you hadn't been in there you didn't really believe that a governmental office would behave like that, you just assumed that they would be full of bureaucrats who would have been on courses about how to deal with the general public.

At the time I was like Queen of the Goths, I was an 'it' girl. I used to be in the NME for my style. I'd be there in whatever I'd had on the night before, something like an ankle length leopard-print fur coat. My hair was pillar-box red, down to my waist. Around that area there were a lot of arty, punky types so there'd be what you might call a motley crew in there. The waiting room was quite big, there were a lot of chairs, and there was a ticket machine so you'd wait for your number to be called. There was a row of booths which ran along one wall, each one a sort of cubicle, but if you were sitting waiting near one of the booths you could hear everything that was being said to the claimant.

I was struck by the size of it and the manner in which people were being spoken to - it was kind of insidious. The officers were extremely rude. I remember going into the booth and the guy behind the counter saying 'So what are you doing in London?' and I said 'Well, I'm trying to find work', and he said 'Why don't you just fuck-off back up north?' It's very naive, but I was absolutely shocked. I was like 'Excuse me?' And he said 'Why don't you fuck off back up north and whore up there instead of littering up the streets here?' I said 'Excuse me!' and said something really ridiculous like 'Do you know who you're talking to? Do you realise what you've just said?' He said 'Yes I fully realise what I've just said. We're sick to death of people like you coming down from the provinces and cluttering up London streets. I'm not signing you on', I said 'You have to sign me on', 'I don't fucking well have to do anything I don't want to do, so you just be aware of that', I said 'Okay, I'm aware of it, now will you sign me on?', he said 'Well I will this time, but you better make sure that you're going back home' I said 'Yeah yeah yeah, I'll go back home'. Now, I talk a lot and I was bereft of words!

It was either steal or grovel, you didn't have any choice, and so it suddenly stopped being a lark and 'Oh isn't it fun! we've run off to London and were going to be pop stars and it's going to be marvelous!' and suddenly it was like 'Oh my god, what have I done?' And I can't go back. And this place is like a juggernaut there's nothing you can do.

We found out from someone who'd worked there that they'd been given instructions to be as rude as possible to the claimants because they wanted to get the unemployment figures down. The worst thing that happened once when I was in there, I noticed a woman who looked very distressed sitting a couple of seats away from me. Her children were crying. She went into the booth and there was a bit of commotion. She put the children on the counter and walked off crying, saying 'I can't feed them anymore, you feed them, you feed them'. All the shutters went down on the cubicles immediately. The police were called. A policewoman took the children, and a police sergeant was banging on the cubicle window with his fists. Everyone's eyes were like saucers. Eventually the shutter went up I remember him saying 'If you ever cause me to come down here again and deal with what you will not deal with, I will take this to the highest possible level. You will come out, now, by that side door and you will speak to me'. I've seldom seen a policeman that livid.

We were told that the staff of Archway Towers had a completely separate entrance to the claimants' and that they had security to get them in and out. They had to be protected from people that they'd abused. So it set a tone throughout London society that, especially the arty types like myself who were down there to try and further our lives and careers, that it was definitely Us and Them. If you did cheat them, great, because they'd brought it on themselves.



Joolz Denby
Barad-dûr 2012

or seeing the boss had actually meant it, good-style.

The first time I went to Tavistock Square dole office, for example, and waited my turn in the damp stinking fug of misery and stoic hopelessness, clutching my numbered ticket in my ratty Goth-queen lace-mittened hand, chewing at last night's black nail polish and thinking of food, lovely, greasy nosh and lots of it, the civil servant who interviewed me called me a whore and a disease and told me to go back to the stinking slum I'd crawled out from, pronto. That was just the start of an unending brutalisation that saw young men, pushed past bearing, throw themselves at the screens dividing the scum - us - from the decent types - them, and bounce off the Plexiglass weeping. That saw old people ripped into by mealy-mouthed girls in ill-fitting blue suits, that saw lone young mothers abandon their toddlers in Archway Towers Office because they no longer had the dosh to feed two mouths always open like baby birds. It was as near to hell as I can imagine.

But I wasn't going to go back to Bradford, no way. Not even when Allen and mum moved down to Chichester when Allen got his much-vaunted job in IT after marrying that snivelling slice of permatanned Leeds strawhead anorexia, Judi. No, even though I was then finally technically free to return to Bradford, I didn't.

After all, I had the legendary London lifestyle. By age thirty-five I'd done well, dragged myself up by my concho'd bootstraps, up from the gutter to a position in the music industry most women would think enviable. I got there by sheer hard work, slogging it out in student bars, then becoming social secretary for the student's union (the 'union' part being a joke, you understand) and after that, in clubs, then venues, then up and up and up through carefully cultivated contacts, favours done and owed, secrets

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There was no sense of courtesy, you didn't feel that you owed them anything.

We were like the huddled masses, crouching round its feet. The song that Justin wrote about the Archway Towers really summed up how we felt about it; partly we hated it, partly we were frightened of it. You felt your confidence ebbing away, your sense of personal security, your sense of self, being eroded by the constant struggle that you had there. It was almost as if they'd set out to make an angry mob of peasants wielding torches. It was actually hard to believe they hadn't done it on purpose. We were young people trying to make a life for ourselves. We were a bit cheeky and a bit Yorkshire-ey, happy-go-lucky but we were harmless. We'd been brought up to work, so none of us were trying

to avoid it. I've done some terrible jobs in my life, to fund the art, but you just do it. We weren't trying to scrounge. They didn't have to be like that with us, but they were. It contributed enormously to a sense of disaffection, disenfranchisement and alienation in the area. It was a really, really bad place. You don't forget places like that. In my latest novel the heroine goes from Bradford to London and she has to sign-on in Archway Towers.

It's one of those places that on some deep superstitious level I think you'd need to exorcise that place, go through it with a smudge stick or with a priest; all those screaming children, those tearful mothers, those old bewildered ladies who were treated like rubbish by young girls in suits. You'd have to go through

it to get rid of the old man I once saw crying quietly in the corner, rocking slightly to himself, a man in his 70s, who'd probably fought in the wars, who had fallen on hard times. A bell and a Wiccan candle would deal with all that. I used to do a big two's-up to the tower. These little gestures make you feel better.

Former staff member, Department of Health and Social Security

When I left home I went travelling and then came back to London where I lived in a squat in Finsbury Park. I needed a job and I was only about twenty one at the time. I applied for a job at the DHSS Finsbury Park, which was based in Archway Tower. There were two offices, Highgate office and Finsbury Park office. I got an interview, got the job and I worked there for I think nearly two years - '81 to '83 - as a clerical officer.

I worked on the fourth floor, very old-fashioned compared to now as everything was paper-based. I was put on the counter because I was quite good with people. You were behind glass looking out at three or four rows of people. That was pretty bleak. There was the odd poster and people sitting around looking pretty despairing. I remember one particular instance when a very young Irish guy came to the counter and he hadn't received his money. As a young clerical officer I was eager to help so I was describing to him what had happened and he sat there saying 'Yes ma'am, yes ma'am, yes ma'am' and ten minutes later he saw a male clerical officer free, so he went to him and shouted and screamed hell at him. He didn't attack me because I was a young woman but he saved it all up for this guy.

I had lots of claims to deal with so I was almost always on the counter. People would have appointments, they would come up one after the other, they'd ask you to find out what happened to their claim, you'd go out the back to find out who was dealing with it and try to sort it out, then inform them of what's happening. Sometimes people really yelled at me. I always certainly did my best for people because I was on the other side of it sometimes in those days too, and it was just the way the system worked. When people got upset, oh god, there were some dreadful scenes. Occasionally the police were called.

The other part of the job would be at a desk where you'd be working out someone's claim. This was in the days when people were entitled to grants for bedding and clothing and all sorts of things, it was a completely different era. I thought it was some sort of community-based job, I was young and naive, I thought I'd be helping people, but of course I wasn't really helping anyone, I was just working for the civil service.

A tea lady would come around at 10 o'clock every day with a trolley, which is a really strange vision now. You'd queue up, buy a drink and a sandwich, and go back to your desk. I remember thinking 'This is no place for me, there's no way I could possibly want to stay here'. The actual building itself is not something I really thought about at the time, it's just where I worked. You know, piles of paper everywhere, you sat at one place, at a desk, unlike now, say, where with laptops you can sit and work anywhere. It was very hierarchical. There was no canteen as I remember, just the tea lady in the morning. When I'd come in, the security guys on the ground floor, they'd make this inane conversation with you. At that age I thought 'What the hell are they even bothering for?' And then of course you reach a certain age yourself and you think 'Oh, I'm like that now'.

People always were very negative about the building, mainly because of what it was there for. So when you told them you worked in 'the tower' people described it as 'a tombstone', or other very negative terms. I met some very nice people there I have to say, because a lot of people like me at the time were just passing through, there just for the sake of the job. For me, I left there and went to another job, then went to uni and onwards after that. It was like a stop in life, that tower. I still have a friend from the job. She was a Visiting Officer, she's had five kids since then and lives around the corner from me. She didn't hang around either. There was a very high turnover of staff.

There was a separate staff entrance to keep the claimants and staff apart. People claiming were sometimes in despair and if somebody got upset they could well want to thump you. I remember feeling tearful at times, going home and thinking 'This is so terrible that people are in this state'. I have one particular memory. I was taking down the details of a young guy at a booth and he said 'Look I don't ever ask for anything, but we just moved to this flat and we've got nothing and we need bedding' and of course I wrote it down very eagerly, went round the back to the Executive Officer to try and make his case, and he just waved it away and talked about the guy as if he was a piece of dirt. I was absolutely horrified that the supervisor could make this sort of moral judgment. Maybe I was naive but I believed what the young guy said, why shouldn't I believe him? It seemed to me the money was there and we needed to give it to people. But he put his foot down and just said 'No, no, no', and it wasn't a judgment about the guy's circumstances, it was a value judgment. This supervisor was quite a bitter and disappointed man really. I remember him and another Executive Officer who hadn't got very far up the ladder in their careers and they were both bitter. I think there was a very negative attitude to some of the claimants. The younger staff members who weren't there as a career were far more open, and positive.

I remember once, a very good way of dealing with it, a guy had made a claim and been turned down and he appealed. He brought a very detailed and intelligent case about why he was right. The point is that lot of people who were claiming didn't have the ability to make that sort of argument. There were two supervisors and a third person and the claimant made the case and won. It was amazing. That's the best way of dealing with anything in life, you can't always do that though; you either can't intellectually or emotionally.



Archway tower is a huge building.

The best that one can say about it is that the view from the staff canteen on the top floor is probably the best in London. What one can say about the rest of the building is not so complimentary.

Jeremy Corbyn MP, 12.07.85, House of Commons
Hansard

Previous page:
Paul Graham
Waiting Room, Highgate DHSS, North London
From the series *Beyond Caring* 1984
© the artist, Courtesy Anthony Reynolds Gallery, London

The Minister can hide. He will not be sitting at a counter in the Archway Tower, with a piece of plate glass between himself and applicants for social fund benefit, telling them no and watching their anger as they suddenly discover that what they could get as a right is now a discretionary matter. The Minister will be hiding away in his plush office at the Elephant and Castle. A poor, low-paid civil servant will have to face the ire of those who have lost their benefits because of the social fund.

Jeremy Corbyn MP, 13.01.88, House of Commons
Hansard

Jeremy Corbyn, Member of Parliament for Islington North

I first came across Archway Tower in 1974 when I moved to this part of London. I've always thought it to be unbelievably ugly. That sense of ugliness and looming misery surrounding the architecture of the tower is something that's always been in my mind.

Fast forward a bit, there was then a huge campaign about the widening of the Archway Road that I strongly opposed. I was chair of planning and public works in Haringey. The Archway Tower was a sort of peripheral feature to the desecration of the architecture of the area along with the dual carriageway. Forward a bit more, the Department of Health and Social Security moved into the office and I became the MP for Islington North in 1983. I frequently visited the Archway Tower in its days as a then DHSS office and had many meetings on the top floor. The only good thing you could say about it was that the view was great, meetings less so, because it was always about the problems of benefits, and of special payments, and it was totally unsuitable as a DHSS office. They wanted to move out from the very beginning, I later discovered, and

indeed eventually did, after I'd raised the issue at the then Social Security Select Committee about the inadequacy of the tower and its facilities. They had to screw the furniture to the floor because somebody had tried to throw it out of the window, and then they put polycarbonate glass in, which was then scratched. A ghastly place.

Then the issue turned on what happens to the tower next. A lot of people locally wanted the tower demolished and something else replacing it. There have been no end of grandiose schemes about rebuilding the Archway area. Many property speculators have turned up and wasted a great deal of everybody's time. During this period there was an issue about demolishing the tower and I was asked my views on it. I said I would support getting rid of the tower and some sort of better development in the area, and then a number of problems arose....

Firstly it was claimed by engineers that demolishing the tower was impossible because of the elasticity of the clay, that the tube line would

come up because it was designed with the weight of the tower above it, and so on. I was pretty skeptical of this kind of argument. Then the issue of the costings came up, and the more one looks into it the more ridiculous the level of spending on the Archway Tower becomes. It was built with public money by London Transport and immediately leased out, the head lessee then re-leased the building back into the public sector to the DSS and there was a very long lease taken on inflation linked rent of £1 million a year. We then discussed whether or not Islington Council, this would be late 90s, could compulsory purchase the tower, and that way assist the development of the area. The council already owned the swimming pool site. We went to see the government about it, it was a Labour government and they said they couldn't really see how they could do it because the costs were so great. It would have to buy out the lease and pay for the demolition. The footprint is very small therefore the gain is so small that it would be too expensive, so that was abandoned. Then the Lord Chancellor's Department moved in and spent a great deal

It is easy and cheap for people to blame the staff in the DHSS. I do not necessarily do that. In fact, I do not blame them at all. They have suffered cuts in the past seven years. They have suffered from under-training, compulsory transfer and the threat of privatisation. It is hardly surprising in such an atmosphere, that queues build up and delays and wrong payments accumulate. In the offices in my constituency, there are regularly fights as security guards have been brought in to look after the staff and the building. The atmosphere is one of absolute bedlam.

Jeremy Corbyn MP, 02.11.87, House of Commons
Hansard

of money on refurbishing a leased property that was freehold owned by the public sector. The Office of the Public Guardian is going and there are now vacancies in the tower and I'm not exactly sure what the future tenancy arrangements are.

I think it is a lesson in poor public planning. It is a lesson in the idiocy of 1960s modernity in London which destroyed Euston station, allowed places like Archway Tower to be built, the hotel on Park Lane, a whole load of other things, and basically we're stuck with it. I hope that a public sector use can be found for it, and I hope that there are people working in there who are going to support the local community and shops, and that the area around the tower can be converted largely into housing or some kind of employment related business opportunities.

When I was a member of the Social Security Select Committee in the 80s and early 90s I was not happy about the administration at the tower - not against the staff personally, it was quite the opposite. It was just the pressure of work and the facilities there, so I invited Michael Meacher,

We are some way from the context of the debate, but if the Minister really wants evidence of how appallingly badly the service is being delivered, I shall be extremely glad to send him the 20-page Tower Watch survey of Archway Tower social security office. [...] A dreadful service is badly delivered. I went there and found that people who had been waiting for four hours or more had still not received satisfaction.

Michael Meacher MP, 13.11.91, House of Commons
Hansard

who was then the Labour frontbench Shadow Secretary of State for Social Security, to come and visit. A lot of people there knew me, so I was fine and they were quite friendly towards me, these were all people claiming benefits. Michael always wears a suit and looks very smart and sort of, authoritative, and they decided that he was something to do with the DSS. I explained to these people, mostly men, that Michael was actually the Labour spokesperson for Social Security, they said 'No he's not, he's from the Department' I said 'No no, he's not the Secretary of State, he would like to be but he is not at the moment, he's in the opposition, he is on your side if you want' – 'I dunno about that', and they started a great shouting match with Michael. The whole thing just didn't work, they wouldn't believe me, they certainly didn't believe him, they didn't believe the manager when the manager came out, so it was just a big explosion and Michael had to be taken behind the screens into some place of safety to calm these blokes down.

On another occasion, they had a very practical manager there. There used to be a process of single payments

to people who were homeless, in desperation or in special need. Many used the centres nearby, the Salvation Army or St Mary's Church in Ashley Road. Come Christmas Eve, the manager was there, paying out these special payments and so forth, and it went on and on all day and he ran out of money. The banks were closed and he couldn't get any more cash from anywhere else. He had a lot of guys in there, they were all men who were pretty assertively demanding their money and he didn't have any. As I say, he was a very practical chap, he didn't ever hide behind a screen and send staff out, he went out there and talked to them, he said he was going to sort it out but they'd have to trust him, he said 'Everyone will get their money, but you'll just have to wait while I sort it out'. He couldn't reach anybody in the Department or anywhere else so he wrote out a very large cheque, went down to the Archway Tavern, cashed the said cheque, went back up with a briefcase full of cash, and paid all the guys, who then promptly went down to the Archway Tavern and spent the money on the drink! Recirculation of public money in the environment, it was great.

James Dunnett, architect

I'm co-chairman of an organisation called Docomomo, the Documentation and Conservation of Buildings and Sites of the Modern Movement, which is an international organisation of people who enjoy and understand modern architecture. I'm also a member of the committee of the Twentieth Century Society whose aim it is to look appreciatively at the architecture of the twentieth century.

People don't understand the reasons buildings are that sort of shape. This idea of slabs - it's not because of what they look like on the outside, but because of what they're like inside. In other words, the view that you get from inside. Unless you've been inside you probably won't understand what it's about. I haven't been inside that tower but I have been inside a lot of towers and I know enough about the theory to know that that's the case.

People need to try to understand, not imagine that all modern architects were fools, insensitive and crass, but think that it's just possible that what they did was for a reason. They may have been wrong, but you only advance if you understand the reasons and then you can say 'Yes they said that but they weren't aware of this', but this kind of blank, unthinking reaction is completely uncreative, destructive and unhelpful. I think I understand what the ideas and objectives were which means that I don't just respond in a knee-jerk reaction 'Urgh, how awful!' the way probably 99% of the population does.

Up until the Modern Movement office buildings were always built, and virtually any building was built, in a kind of courtyard format, so that all the accommodation would be around the edge of the site backing onto the street. But people like Le Corbusier thought, starting in the 20s, that the whole of urbanism had been overturned by a number of phenomena, one of which was the motorcar, that meant that the streets, instead of being relatively slow-moving, pedestrian environments with some horse traffic, became racetracks. Corbusier suggested that because modern technology allowed buildings to be built much taller, both structurally and because of lifts and services, that we take advantage of this technology to improve human conditions by just building taller in the middle of the site. That had enormous benefits because instead of people inside the building going straight out onto a noisy, dusty, fume filled canyon, which was the street,

they were able to look out above all that, they were able to get light. Corbusier put sun, space, greenery, steel and concrete, in that order, as the priorities in city planning.

All the people who want to rebuild the Archway in the perimeter style, of which there are many, have got to face that reality, all of those rooms will look straight onto the traffic, whereas the people who are in that tower at the moment are looking out over it. Modern architects, like modern artists, were trying to explore space. For the benefit of the people who are on the ground, instead of being wedged on a narrow strip of ground between the face of the building and the roadway, you have a wide space to wander across. You can wander through the space at the bottom of the tower without being sandwiched between the road and the building.

I think that tower gives the Archway a focus. I'm more conscious of the Archway as a centre than I am of Nag's Head, even though Nag's Head is really much bigger. Nag's Head is a regional centre, in a planner's classification, Archway is a local centre, and yet Archway has much more presence because of that tower. That tower gives Archway a prominence it wouldn't otherwise have, in fact, I almost feel like saying what Nag's Head needs is a tower and someone should build one.

Although it is true that in principle a tall building will catch wind that's higher up and throw it down, from Corbusier's point of view that was almost an advantage because what he hated was the way fumes, dust and what he called the *son de poussière* were trapped in a corridor street, whereas, if you opened out the city, winds could clear the air. I think there's a lot to be said for that. Trees were a critical part of the package, and trees are extremely good wind-breaks, they're not good as sound-breaks, they're not good at all sorts of other things, but they are very good at slowing down winds.

Looking down the Archway Road, the Archway Tower forms a kind of counterpoint. This is in a sense what modern urbanism was all about really, creating buildings as sculptural things in space. But actually, I think this building is really quite exciting if you look at it with a constructivist sensibility. It's much better, I think, than the early phase around the back. It's a carefully considered building,

not off-the-peg curtain walling. The plan form of it is copied from a building in Düsseldorf which has the same three-slab format. This building, the Dreischeibenhaus features on the cover of a famous book called *Modern Architecture in Europe* by Kidder Smith. Archway Tower does achieve an astonishing monumentality given that it's not actually a very big building, by simply treating each half of the building as a separate element.

I disagree with the idea the tower embodies Thatcher's Britain. For a start it pre-dates Thatcher's Britain, and secondly, Thatcher is well known for her preference for neo-Georgian architecture. In fact, the reaction against this building is much more Thatcherite. This building represents, and is still an embodiment of, albeit a latter day one, the Modern Movement ideals generally associated with socialism and the welfare state. Although the building has a dark colour scheme they probably thought that was quite sleek. I don't think that the darkness in itself is a bad thing. There are some buildings of that period which had that, and after all, one of the great buildings of the Modern Movement was the Seagram Building by Mies van der Rohe in New York, which is very dark. What I think is a problem in the London that we have, being an irregularly planned city, is that this format of a rectangular slab is actually difficult to accommodate. I think this tower doesn't fit in very well. Coming up Holloway Road you're faced with just the three blank ends of the slab and it does look rather daunting and forbidding. You're approaching it from a rather arbitrary point of view. I think it looks much better if you come along Junction Road from the south and you see the windowed faces.

I'm not saying that it's a great work of architecture and I wouldn't be sorry if it was demolished, but I would be sorry if it was demolished through ignorance. I think that people should understand the objectives of that sort of building. If they demolish them and build to recreate the Victorian city with perimeter buildings, fumes, no light, no air then that would be Thatcherism embodied to the nth degree. We're in an era of total reaction in this country, of which Thatcher was an early phenomenon, in architecture as in many other fields.



Tania Leuschner
Dreischeibenhaus, Dusseldorf 2008

Office block puts the wind up passers-by!

STRONG winds blowing up a gale around Archway Tower are sweeping unsuspecting passers-by off their feet and making them hang on to their hats.

The high-rise block is causing ground-level turbulence which sends blustering winds "of up to 50 miles an hour" howling through the Archway Mall near the subway.

Now council planners are looking at ways to cover the alley and send the wind across the top of a roof to provide cover from the elements.

"There has been a lot of pressure over some time to do something about this area because the wind is dangerous if your balance is affected," said an Islington Council spokesman. "It can be a danger to older or disabled people and a proposal for some sort of shield is being looked in to."

By JOSIE JUDGE

A bid will be submitted to the Department of the Environment's Urban Programme when planning chiefs have given final designs the go-ahead.

Gearoid O'Meachair, manager of Archway neighbourhood office, Vorley Road, said covering the windy mall was "the first step in the right direction for improving safety in Archway".

He added: "It is a serious problem and not a fuss about nothing. It is quite genuine and is a widely held worry in this area."

Office block puts the wind up passers-by!
Islington Gazette 1992
Courtesy Islington Local History Centre

Thursday 18th June 1998 16. NEWSDESK 0181-340

Blaze threat to former DSS tower

ARCHWAY Tower - one of the area's most hated buildings - was threatened by fire on Friday.

By ALISON CAMPSIE

Thick black smoke drifted from the rooftop as firefighters tried to control the blaze.

The fire brigade received nearly 70 calls from the public alerting them to the blaze - which broke out around 3.35pm.

Workers are currently refurbishing the disused 15-storey office block, which once housed the DSS.

It is believed the fire started after electrical sparks fell on a disused water tank on top of the building.

Firefighters from Kentish Town, Holloway and Hornsey used the workers' lift shaft to reach the roof. The flames

were brought under control in about 10 minutes. There were no casualties and all workers were accounted for when the fire brigade arrived. The area around Archway Tower was sealed off for an hour.

Witness, Roy Fagan, saw the blaze from his 12th floor flat in Crouch Hill. He said: "I could see huge orange flames leaping off the top of the tower block. There was a massive black cloud of smoke that moved over London for about five minutes afterwards."

A fire brigade spokesman said: "Because everyone could see the fire, it actually looked worse than it was. The fire caught the attention of a lot of people."

Blaze threat to former DSS tower
Islington Gazette 1998
Courtesy Islington Local History Centre

Andrew Allsop, wind engineer

I used to stay in a bedsit just northeast of Archway. I stayed there for a few months while I was looking round for somewhere more comfortable to stay. I think I'd known about the Archway Tower for some time before that as I was using the tube station every day. I also knew about the windiness around tall buildings but using it everyday helps you to appreciate how much these tall buildings do affect the environment around them.

I'm a wind engineer so of course I had a fair idea about what exactly the wind was doing around the tower when I experienced it. The problem is that it acts like a big sail to the prevailing wind which blows straight onto the front face of it, that creates a pressure on the front face, it also generates a suction behind it which combines to give the force on the building in the wind, but of course in the case of the Archway Tower there is a connection between the windward side and the leeward side, under the building, and the wind takes the short route underneath and hence makes it very windy there.

I can't quite remember exactly how it happened, but an architect friend of

one of the directors of the company I was working for rang them up about possibly improving the wind conditions. We talked about putting canopies up and one thing or another. It was one of those projects where there was relatively little money to do things that were good enough to really make a significant impact. I remember when I was there, it must've been the late 80s I suppose, that the shops were very rundown at that point, almost abandoned. There was occasionally a little market in the square underneath the tower, but of course it's quite windy quite often, and I'm never quite sure how successful that was. You didn't hang around there because it wasn't a place that it was comfortable to linger, and this is to a large degree caused by the tower itself, I believe.

Part of my job now is to try and come up with building arrangements that minimise the wind problems. It's not easy; once you have an object of that size it pushes the wind down on a scale which is commensurate with at least the width of the building if not the height. The kind of mitigations that you then need at ground level if you haven't thought about it from

the start become quite significant on the same sort of scale. One of the oldest methods you've probably seen in several 60s buildings, where they did take wind advice at the time, was to put towers on top of a podium, and the podium essentially stops the strong winds from getting all the way down to street level; it kind of shuts them off, stops them coming all the way down. There are architectural reasons why podia are considered undesirable but they're very effective at dealing with the wind. If you start putting canopies, little skirts around buildings they can also be effective but the problem then is the canopies themselves are very expensive, and the spaces they create underneath the canopy are not especially valuable compared with putting shops and things in to make up the podiums, so they're difficult to put in.

The orientation of the tower is also an aggravating factor. It was probably orientated to suit the site, it may also have been oriented at the time to try and capture the sun, so it's sort of facing the south. I think it's southwest facing. And of course the prevailing wind, the prevailing strong wind comes straight onto the wide face. If you want to minimise the wind

problem you might turn the building round by 45°, but then you have a different problem of energy in the building in that you can't take advantage of the sun. Sometimes you want to take advantage of the sun's heat, sometimes you don't. It depends on the use of the building.

The relationship of the tower and the roads is quite important in the sense that the presence of the roads and pavements makes certain mitigation quite impossible with the road being so close. These days a building like that would be investigated before it was built. Probably, certainly building it back I should go into a wind tunnel to check what's going on and maybe the exact position and certainly the arrangements around the base would be adjusted to ensure that you were achieving acceptable conditions. That's fairly standard practice now, but it wasn't at the time.

Maggie Smyth, Archway resident and church volunteer

I don't do anything and I do a lot. I've lived in Archway for fifty years. I'm retired now because I'm seventy-four and, of course, during that time there's been a lot of changes in the area. One of them has been the tower, and me personally, I don't really like the tower because one thing, I don't know how it happens, but it makes an awful draft doesn't it? Under there it blows. I knew several people who'd had their handbags blown away. Before, when we had everything paid from the post office, it's blown away our pension books! I know several people that lost their belongings because of the Archway Tower, they weren't holding on tight and the wind took it and it was gone.

Of course, to build the tower and make the roundabout they had to get rid of a lot of shops. There was a nice fish shop, I think people miss that. For me personally, and I think for a lot of people living in Archway I think it would be just nice if the tower disappeared, but of course that won't happen. There would be a lot of disruption. You would have to divert the traffic.

I remember when it was built and there were people for it and people against it. I don't think people realised it would be so high and so dark. I'd just like it to disappear.



The Electric Palace, Highgate Hill 1922
Courtesy Islington Local History Centre

Ladies at the Girdlestone Third Age Group

The Electric Palace picture house used to be there and a big bank on the corner. I used to go in the picture house, I only lived opposite. I used to go free! You could stand up the back of the cinema and watch the films but sometimes there were men who would try to touch you and I'd just jab them hard with my hat pin - that got rid of them!

At Junction Road, on the corner, there used to be Boots the Chemist. Then there was ABC coffee shop, I don't know what the other shop was. Then you had the tube, and from the tube you had the sweet shop and then there was a bookshop. There was a bakers on the corner of Macdonald Road which has McDonald's now. He used to bake all his own bread at the back and I used to go over to get six pennies of stale bread so that we could eat. And we used to get about eight loaves to take home, ones you could eat and cut up, and the others, you can't, so we used to soak them in water to make a bread pudding. We used to live on bread pudding and mashed potatoes. Or bread and dripping, bread and lard with a bit of salt on it.

There was a shop called Dorycotts at the Archway. They sold clothes and other bits and pieces. You used to put your money in this moving track thing and it used to go along the ceiling to the cashier. But you couldn't have anything unless you'd paid for it first. You'd have to pay for it before you get it.

When the tower was built my dad went mad. He kept getting in touch with the authorities to say they were shutting the light out of our houses. They still moan about it now. It's still an eyesore now really. No one responded when my dad complained, the usual deaf ears. They'd give you a good ol' waddle like they do every time they're building something that people disagree with, it still goes up.

At the picture house I saw Ronald Colman and Greer Garson in *Mrs Miniver*. Lovely films then. *Rebecca*. Laurence Olivier used to be in there before he was a Sir, I used to see his films. I liked them sort of films. I remember watching a film in Highgate picture house when the Archway was bombed. They had a landmine on St John's Way.

They lost forty-five kiddies. What they'd done was, all the neighbours and that, got together with their little bit of rations and said that they were definitely going to have a party for the children, and these forty-five children, they all got killed. They're all in the Highgate Cemetery, as a group. I remember them bombing Macdonald Road. Where that slope is. I remember when we were out for about 4 weeks, we wasn't allowed to get in our houses at all. I was living with my aunt, my whole family was living with my aunt. They think the bomb must have travelled, but they never did find it, but it made a great big crater and smashed the windows and all that. But they could never find the bomb. So they said it must have travelled.



● A towering cheek... drama student Majid Javadpur tests the mettle – and patience – of the police by scaling the Archway Tower (right). Police went up to reason with him (above) but were less than amused by his antics.

Police bring stunt down to earth with an earful

TO PASSER-BY Andrew Hart, who took these pictures, it had all the hallmarks of a classic suicide attempt: a young man, 100ft up the scaffolding surrounding Archway Tower, threatening to jump.

The walkways around the tower were sealed off as trained police moved in at about 4.20pm last Friday to try and reason

with Majid Javadpur, a 19-year-old student from Wood Green.

An hour and a half later and it was all over – Mr Javadpur was safely down and taken to the nearby Whittington Hospital to assess his physical and mental state.

But what no-one was expecting was Mr Javadpur's response: he announced that he was a drama student who had scaled the tower to see how the police and emergency services would react.

After some stern words from

the police, he was then driven home, but not before giving his date of birth... April 1, 1980.

Inspector Stewart Rivers, of Holloway Police, was less than amused about Mr Javadpur's antics.

"Police take this type of action very seriously indeed and this person's actions were totally inappropriate. A lot of police resources were taken up with this which could have been used elsewhere," said the inspector.

● Islington suicide rates on the increase – page 2.

Police bring stunt down to earth with an earful
Highbury & Islington Express 1999
Courtesy Islington Local History Centre

Life in the shadows of the big black blot . . .

SPRING is coming and I'm afraid the bright sunshine and clear light will bring out the awful squalor of the Archway.

Has anyone else noticed it? I know it has never been one of the beauty spots of old England, but it had its own familiar homely charm when I lived there in my youth. We didn't have an enormous roundabout then, with dirty depressing tunnels to drive us underground. We didn't have that great black blot on the landscape called Archway Towers. We did have a lovely view up Highgate Hill to Holy Joe's. Now we almost don't and won't if the bridge comes.

The tube station had a domed ceiling with stars twinkling all over it — now the dull ceiling matches the unhappy faces of the staff. We had shops and a cinema up Highgate Hill from the tube. Now we have a gale swirling round the bottom of that same great black blot (Is it really true they propose to have a market in the open space? What will the traders do — nall everything down before it blows away?).

However, what is gone is well and truly gone and we can recall it with

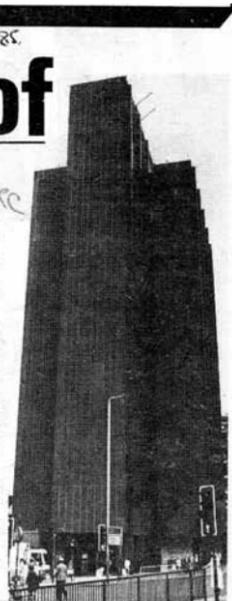
fondness but not pine for it to be restored. We must get on with what we have.

I have two areas in mind which if improved would make my life easier — two areas where change would be relatively simple.

The lights in the underpass at the Archway have not worked fully for any length of time since one day last summer when they started to go out one by one. Work has been done but to no great purpose and they are less than 50 per cent capacity now. Anyone for a quick mugging? The walls have had their annual wash, making way for the 1985 crop of f-a and funnies, and I for one am very grateful. If it weren't for the road sweeper coming through each day where would we be, fellow tunnel walkers? He deserves a commendation for doing his job so well.

For somewhere around the last five years us poor tube passengers have been trudging up and down the spiral staircase because one or other of the escalators is out of order. Anybody else got a rheumatic hip, or a gammy knee? Thank heavens for the young guard calling which train is in so we know whether to run for the cattle truck or not.

Am I the only one who minds? — E J Hart, Haberton Road, N19.



● ARCHWAY TOWERS — where the wind blows.

Life in the shadows of the big black blot...
Islington Gazette 1985
Courtesy Islington Local History Centre



AIR Archive
Plants beneath Archway Tower 2012

Darren Hills, fruit and vegetable stall owner

I see the bottom part of the tower all day long. A lot of the older people don't like it because they remember the old buildings there. No one's ever got anything nice to say about it, ever, but it's there now, we can't get rid of it can we? It's too big to knock down now. It's always windy because of this big massive building they've plonked on the middle of Archway. But what I will say is it is one nasty building in the wind, it's whips around it all day long and it hits here, it could be 80°C outside the post office in the summer and 15°C here, it's absolutely crazy.

The window cleaners are sort of quite funny when they're flying up and down the building on their ropes abseiling. When they clean the windows

it looks like it's snowing down here with all the foam coming down.

They should liven up a little bit, put a bit of colour on the side of it anyway, because it's a bit dull and grey and morbid. Paint a big rainbow over it, do something, paint it white so it looks nice. Because it does look a bit horrible and dull when you come up the Holloway Road, that big thing sitting in front of you. Something to brighten the place up. What can we do? Light? Paint? Glowing paint? I don't know, something to lighten it up, put some flags on the top of it. Different flags of the world for the Olympics, that might attract a bit of attention.

Transport for London employee, Archway Tube Station

A few years ago there was scaffolding all the way round Archway Tower and people were saying 'What's all that for?'. Apparently, one of the roof tiles had fallen down, or a glass panel had come down and hit the ground, and they were really worried about other ones falling down so they put scaffolding all the way around it. I was talking with one of the security guards one day and I said 'When are they going to finish it?', and he said that there 'Was this thing up on the roof' that they were going to use to check it and he said 'They were going to use it but it's condemned, so until we find something that we can use, the scaffolding stays up'. It stayed up for over a year.

One day, shortly after 7/7 somebody said to me 'There's an unattended package outside the station'. I went out to look and it was a suitcase with Arabic stickers and writing on. It was right underneath Archway Tower, right underneath one of the pillars, and I saw it and I thought 'Ooh, that's not good!' We were all still wearing a hypervisor thing back then because we were all on alert for terrorism so I phoned the police and started evacuating. The police got here right away and said 'What's the problem?' and I said 'That!' and he goes 'Oh! Okay!' So he runs around putting tape up everywhere and we're closing the station and there was this one drunk out front, he hangs around here sometimes, and he said 'What's the problem?' And I said 'Oh there's

this dodgy package over there' and he said 'Oh that's nothing, nothing but a bunch of passports'. I said 'How do you know?' and he said 'I've already gone through it'. So I said to the police officer 'Listen to this guy, talk to this guy' and he said 'There's nothing in that, just a bunch of old passports, you don't need to close the station'. I thought it was quite comical. All this big thing, it looked quite, you know, putting it under the support pillar of a tower block, you think, wow, if somebody wanted to do something that's probably where they'd stick it. And just to find out that some drunk had already rifled through it about an hour earlier or was quite funny. We all had a good laugh about it.

We had problems with water leaking in the stairwell right underneath the tower for years. We kept phoning Thames Water and they were going 'We don't know where the leak is' and it took them nine months to find the leaky thing and fix it. The water was coming in underneath the tower. It was coming in the Highgate exit and then right across the stairs and underneath. It was so bad we ended up getting water coming in the station and we had a little plant, a little fungus, a little tiny tree actually growing in the spiral staircase. If you go down the spiral staircase and look on the wall you'll see one little section where the water was coming in and all kinds of plants are still growing there.

Ham & High

HAMPSTEAD & HIGHGATE EXPRESS

HATED TOWER TO SURVIVE REVAMP

100 PAGES OF PROPERTY INSIDE THIS WEEK

AIR Archive
Ham & High Screamer c2007

Stephanie Smith, Market Manager and Archway resident

I've lived in Archway now for fifteen years, but I also lived here for four or five years as a teenager. We moved here when I was about eleven until I was about fourteen. I lived here and my mum worked for the DHSS, the Department for Health and Social Security, which was in Archway Tower. Sometimes I would go and visit her at work. She worked there for a relatively short time, I think it was five months, but she had to leave, she had to give up her job because she couldn't handle it any more. It was making her too unhappy. It literally made her weak and made her suffer so much. Working for the DHSS and having to turn away poor people and say 'Sorry, I can't give you anything' and have them be either abusive or just devastated, all of it was very, very challenging for her. To be in that building with that happening... I watched her change over a few months and she very bravely took the decision after a while to remove herself from it. It was a depressing environment. Even in the morning she'd be getting dressed to go to work and I'd see her whole aspect change, then, approaching the tower, 'I've got to go in the tower'.

That's a really early memory of it and I suppose that stayed in my mind.

I've worked on the market since it opened in February 2006. I started the market originally underneath the tower - it was absolutely bonkers, in the middle of a wind tunnel, and we had to batten everything down with sandbags, ropes and shipping cleats. Because of the physics of the place it's a very windy area. Before I set up the market I made a proposal to put a wind turbine in the middle of the Mall and to make stalls that actually lock into the ground so that they don't move, and have a kind of Maypole affair getting the wind turbine to power electricity for the stalls. I did quite a bit of research about wind turbines so for me it's just really obvious that we've got to cover the Archway Tower in wind turbines and solar panels.

The big thing about the tower that does me in, and the other buildings up there, is that there's been a lot of talk about Archway as if it's made of Lego. Talks about 'When Archway is going to be regenerated', 'When they change it up there', 'When are they

changing up there?', 'When they re-do it', blah blah blah and it's just like - shut up! Come on! I like to deal with what we've got now and be practical and work with what we've got, and with the reality that the central piece of land is owned privately by owners who don't give a damn and will not engage. The tower is probably going to be empty in March but it isn't going anywhere, they're not going to knock it down. I do personally find it ugly and dark. I'm not at all one of those people who appreciate Brutalist architecture. We're stuck with it though, so the only thing we can do is work with what we've got.

What a lot of people associate with it is an end-of-the-world scenario, a type of doom feeling, that's what it brings, it doesn't really bring any joy to many people. I know some people quite like it, the way some people quite like breezeblocks, what can you say? People have differing tastes. But I'm with, probably, the majority. It seems to me an extremely aesthetically displeasing monstrosity and I hate it. If Superman was available to just make it disappear, that would be ideal.

Xavier Llarch Font, artist

I took part in a project at Byam Shaw that was about arriving in an area that you don't know that much about and trying to find something that interests you and then working with that thing. I was talking to people about what they thought about the tower and then all of a sudden the tower spoke to me through what it contains, the activity. I found out that what the people inside are doing is exactly what's happening to the tower - all of them help people who are unable to make decisions for themselves so that someone else isn't going to use them or do something bad to them. When you end up giving someone else that power over you, to make decisions on your behalf in the future, it's really complex. These documents of pre-inscription, all these forms... so it's three organisations; one is for children, the other one is for the people who are now mentally incapable of taking those decisions for themselves, and the third organisation is for people that might be able to make the decisions now, but in the future they know that they're not going to be able to.

During those two weeks in Archway I was talking to people about the tower and then just trying to observe by myself what was happening with it and its surroundings. Just through spending time there, little stories happened. The first one was really simple, I saw an old person on the other side of that empty bit underneath where the newspaper kiosk is, and he was waiting. He didn't see me because I was taking pictures. He was just waiting to see if someone was passing by to get their attention to ask them to help him to cross underneath the tower because the wind was so bad that he needed the support of someone to go across otherwise he would fall. I thought 'Wow, this is really happening, this is really affecting people every single day, when he needs to cross underneath the tower it's really dangerous for him'. I was just standing there waiting for things to happen so I helped him.

That was a bad point for the tower, and I thought I'd become sort of a deputy of the tower, so I would almost be representing what is 'he' doing that is good and what is 'he' doing that is bad.

When I talked to the window cleaners they told me that the tower was a 'naughty' tower because 'he' had missed being cleaned two or three times. There is a apparently an obligation for these towers to be cleaned every six months, something to do with the Greater London Authority, but they miss it as many times as possible. I think that influences the look of the tower. It's dirty and it doesn't reflect the light and it looks really sad. But apparently, within their company, some people wanted to work there because two or three years ago a guy was cleaning the windows and a girl inside put a piece of paper with a phone number on the window and they went for a date. I thought that was really nice! So it's known as the Tower of Love, the Love Tower.

Everyone has an opinion about the tower and its future is really uncertain. Some people want it to be demolished. Every council party change brings a different agenda, including some proposals about changing the external aspect to make it more contemporary and pretty. That's something that really interested me, that a building could be judged just for its external appearance. We always talk about humans being judged by their external appearance and I thought 'How are they going to decide that?' and then tried again to relate all of this to the organisations contained inside.

I proposed that I myself could become the deputy for the tower and that I would archive, for a year, all the different stories, things happening around the tower, that could help in the future to help the person who has to decide the future of the tower, so they have there, in front of them, objective stories and facts around the tower to help them make the decision for the tower, because

it cannot make the decision itself. When it was empty, I would go in and take one little office that would be the Office of the Deputy, and start archiving all these documents and writing all these forms to give to Islington. This office could also be used for the community to take part in, to have their say, and to become a place for talks and have a program that was not just about my own opinions as an artist and designer, but an office to archive all these good and bad points. Never judging it, keeping it really open, trying to keep it as objective as possible, collecting facts around it.

To be honest, I felt sorry for it. I was doing a project for my Masters and spent six months talking about an unfinished tower. Some crazy Victorian man was trying to build a replica of the Eiffel Tower, actually bigger, where Wimbledon Stadium is now. He built the first level and people went to visit it but then he ran out of money. I was obsessed with finishing off that tower, conceptually, finding many ways, for the community. Then I arrived in Archway and there's a tower that nobody wants. In my head there was this big contradiction.

I've never been inside Archway Tower. I always looked at it from outside. It was never for me this romantic idea of viewing the city from the tower. Elevating from a particular point of the city, so that you can see the rest of the city, almost being an outsider even if you are inside, you are separated from the ground and looking at it and being able to reflect. Archway Tower was not like that for me, it was more like a magnet.



Xavier Llarch Font
Abselling window cleaners 2011



*A Heightened Response Level
Archway Tower, Conall McAteer 2012*

Archway Tower Security Manager

I'll give you the history, you ready?

I came here in July 2005. There was a band called New Model Army who made a track called 'Archway Towers'. The song was about the Department of Social Security which used to be based here in the 1980s and '90s. During that time they were based on the 13th and 14th floor where everyone used to go and get their giros and their benefits. I was a postmaster for the Post Office Investigations Department and I used to liaise with the people up there about fraud.

Archway is a place with many histories. Lots of people don't realise that there's people from all walks of life, there are a lot of famous artists, you go up the road and you've got the old Highgate Cemetery where you've got Marxism, I forgot his name, but anyway it was due to someone called Marx, and it was Communism. Around here you do see people from all walks of life, particularly artists, where they've got plaques on their doors, or you'll go up the Highgate, go up the Hampstead and you'll see that there are a lot of famous people around.

Also Dick Whittington, hence you've got the Whittington Hospital just up the road. Dick Whittington wanted to be the Lord Mayor and a voice came telling him to turn back. During that time he could hear from there the Bow Bells, which was way down there in the East End and he could hear them.

He was told to come back and then he became Mayor three times, apparently, and that's the story of Dick Whittington. In the old days you've got to imagine, there was no traffic, you could definitely hear the Bow Bells, and I can still hear them ringing under me.

A lot of people are biased about the Archway Tower, they don't want it here, they say that it causes a lot of wind, but I've been here all this time and looked after this building, and this building has always been my heart and I'm going to dearly miss it, to be honest. I love the view of the building, the building here shows the North, the East, the South and the West, the whole of London, including Essex, Croydon... You've got the old famous Ally Pally, which is over there on my left hand side, and back to my right hand side you got the old

Crystal Palace. Ally Pally used to send out radio signals and Crystal Palace used to do TV. I don't know if they still do it, but there you go, and you got the BT Tower. This is real London. I mean, a lot of people are negative towards the tower, I can understand that there is a lot of politics and all that, but I think if it was vamped up a little bit, and done up a little bit, so it looks nice, I'm sure that people would not take a wrong opinion about it. I think it's beautiful. But I believe that a lot of people have the opinion about it because it was a DSS building, it was where a lot of people collected their giros. People had a lot against it.

In the song by New Model Army, funnily enough, they say people would actually collect the cigarette stubs and take them from the ashtray and smoke them. In them days there was cigarette smoking allowed in the building. This is an iconic building. Whatever happens, happens, but I'll dearly miss it.

Archway Tower

- ☆ Directly over Archway Underground Station.
- ☆ 70,400 sq. ft. ☆ Fully air-conditioned.
- ☆ Fully carpeted throughout.
- ☆ Private car park. ☆ Solar glazing.

It adds up to London's latest and most accessible office tower.

Possession September '74.

Sole letting agents:

JONES LANG WOOTTON

103 Mount Street,
London W1Y 6AS
Tel : 01-493 6040.
Telex : 23858.

Archway Tower advert
The Daily Telegraph 1974
Courtesy Islington Local History Centre



Ernest Milner
No 2 Junction Road (present address of Archway Tower) 1904
Courtesy Islington Local History Centre

c. 1390	Richard Whittington 'turns again' at the sound of Bow Bells
1806	Cottage and plot behind owned by Richard Martimer
?	a site for a tower 1848 - House, garden and orchard owned by George Hedger
?	what/who owned - presumably farmland - my earliest map 1850 already built up
1853	terraced houses first built on the corner shown on Parish map
c1854-97	Benjamin Samuel Williams's Victoria & Paradise Nursery
1907	Highgate Tube Station opens
1909-58	Electric Theatre, later named the Palace Cinema
1939	Tube station renamed Archway
1950's	Chivers Jam Warehouse
1961	Building started on redevelopment, phase one Blue Star House
1962	Outline planning permission for tower given by London County Council
1970	Ordnance Survey map shows empty space <i>for Tower</i>
1971	Detailed planning permission approved by London Borough of Islington
1971	Construction begun by Rodwell Group, architect Oscar Garry & Partners
1974	Completed tower handover with 70,400 sq ft offices. <i>?something here about how they couldn't let it??</i>
c1975-94	Building is home to North London <i>DHSS</i> (Department of Social Security) <i>Health and</i>
1985	Radio antennae erected on the roof
1988	<i>DHSS splits into Dept. of Health and Dept of Social Security</i>
1985-90	<i>Empty</i>
1993	Wind study by Imperial College
1995-02	<i>Empty</i>
1998	Leasehold sold by Orb Estates to Shah & Patel
1998	Fire on rooftop
1999	Majid Javadpur, nineteen year old drama student from Wood Green, scales the tower
1999 - 2001	Refurbishment
2002	Office of the Public Guardian (OPG) and the Children and Family Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) relocated to the tower. <i>(who there between 00 and 02??)</i>
2004	Wichford acquire the leasehold
2007	Scarborough Property Group PLC acquire the leasehold
2007	Australian-listed VALAD Property Group acquire the remaining 115 year lease
2012	OPG and CAFCASS leave on 24 th March at lease break, four years before the forty-two year lease by the government is complete. The final annual rent is £1,116,000.

Working timeline for the site of Archway Tower
Ruth Ewan and AIR 2012

All accounts within this publication are based on interviews conducted by Mathilda Fowler and Ruth Ewan between December 2011 and March 2012. Fang's original interview with Ruth Ewan took place in March 2008.

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MAYOR OF LONDON

How to Make Archway Tower Disappear – a Response

I used to think that 'Brutalism' describes a style of architecture which is brutal. It doesn't, though it is perhaps a forgivable, even logical, mistake to make. Brutalism comes from the French 'beton brut' or 'raw concrete', a phrase used by the architect Le Corbusier to describe many of his post war buildings.

When I first saw Archway Tower it seemed to fit my mistaken definition of Brutalism, turning a harsh face onto the Holloway Road with its tinted glass facade, entirely devoid of windows. My friend Susanna, who lives up the road, described it as 'a monstrosity'.

It also seemed to fit an era which told it like it was – this was the DHSS office throughout the 1980s, with the tower an apt symbol for the divisions of a time which saw riots across Britain, unemployment at 3 million, the Falklands War and the miners' strike.

Paul Graham's photograph in Ruth Ewan's collection of pieces about the tower shows a roomful of defeated-looking people waiting on wooden benches, surrounded by litter – empty crisp packets, cigarette packets and fag butts. It was taken in 1984 and is a world away from today's clean and shiny council offices with their posters of smiling children. The thing is, today's divisions are far worse – but the difference is that they are no longer visible.

The tower stands there like a monolith from an earlier unvarnished age, before the triumph of marketing took over every local authority department. All that it stood for seems to have been airbrushed away, by council free sheets which proclaim their successes and Orwellian turns of phrase which have seen the unemployed rebranded as 'jobseekers', or worse, 'workless'. But today Ruth Ewan's project is airbrushing the tower away. Is it removing an honesty we don't allow ourselves to face anymore? Branding the tower a Thatcherite icon might seem to give it an honesty but, as ever, reality is far more complex than seductive simplicity.

Brutalism, which flourished from the mid 1950s to the mid 1970s, grew from the post war socialist optimism of modernism and visions of streets in the sky which would raise living standards. Built in 1974, at the tail end of that period as the post war social settlement began to crumble, the tower may have gone onto to embody the Thatcherite 1980s, but its conception was a socialist one.

So this socialist project ended up the subject of a late 80s song by political band, New Model Army, who had signed on at the tower and witnessed its misery first hand. Their hit song 'Archway Towers', begins with a description of a toddler sent to collect fag butts for his parents to roll into cigarettes while they wait for their benefits, opening with the lines 'Rolling up tab ends that the baby's collected/Waiting for the number that clicks on the wall.'

Whatever definition is given to the term, Archway Tower is brutal, both in its appearance and its history. In contrast, this is a gentle project which erases the tower from the landscape without causing any destruction. Demolition is inevitably an act of violence but Ruth Ewan has found a way of vanishing the tower, just for a moment in time, without any disruption.

It is a fantasy, based on one man's fantasy. Ruth's friend Fang, a local resident, artist and busker who met Ruth while busking, dreamt of making the tower disappear. He and Ruth talked about it and some years later Ruth worked out a way of making it happen.

A few minutes walk down the Holloway Road, on the corner of St John's Grove, a viewer sits on the pavement, of the kind one might expect to find at the seaside or at a site of historic interest. Standing on the platform and looking through it, up the Holloway Road towards the station, the usual comings and goings are visible yet the tower is simply not there. The viewer could not be more low-tech in appearance, yet inside computer software is changing the daily reality of the Holloway Road in the same way as the blemishes on models are airbrushed away.

People constantly stop and look at the viewer in puzzlement, then stand on the platform and look through it. It is a disruption to daily life, but a playful one which is unexpected and enjoyable.

Life in city streets is ever more controlled and micromanaged by CCTV, security guards, 'ambassadors' and 'way finders' so that the public life of the city resembles the clean, safe and well-ordered environment of a shopping mall, except without the roof on top. In many places hanging out is actually banned, with groups of young people not allowed to gather on street corners, moved on instead by 'dispersal orders'.

The Holloway Road is not much like these privatised 'malls without walls' but even so Ruth's intervention is slightly subversive, puncturing normal routines and creating an unusual moment of spontaneous surprise. First comes the unexpected moment, then more of a focus on Archway Tower, suddenly not there anymore. What is it? What was it? What does it mean to me and you?

Today the tower is empty and no one knows what to do with it. Some claim that it is too expensive to demolish, because the tube line was designed with the weight of the tower above it. Others talk of grandiose schemes which will transform the area. In the current economic climate, with property development stalled all around the country, it seems unlikely that tower will be forcibly removed any time soon.

Yet, an unexpected but key aspect to Ruth's project is how, despite its history, there are people who really seem to love the tower. Local people Ruth talked to describe it as 'home'. It has a presence, it's the immovable backdrop to their changing lives. The security manager who looks after the empty building is going to 'dearly miss it'. For him 'it's beautiful'.

As a south Londoner I don't really know the tower. It hasn't been part of the fabric of my life. The first time I noticed it was a few years ago when I was visiting my friend Susanna who'd just had a baby at the Whittington Hospital. I remember noticing how windy it was coming out from the station at the foot of the tower. So for me, even though I know about its difficult history, the tower is more about my friendship with Susanna than anything else. Now it's also about Ruth's project.

Perhaps some of the failures of modernism are down to the fact that it's not really possible to plan the future of buildings and places and the way people will respond to them. A building like the tower is a lot more than the former DHSS office. It is the receptacle for thousands upon thousands of memories and desires, dashed hopes and expectations, unmet or exceeded, over decades. Many will be associated with its actual, dismal, function, but many others speak of love. On the way to meet Ruth I found myself feeling envious that I didn't have a tower like that in my life, which could be the focus for all my memories of a place, over years.

Anna Minton, June 2012

How to Make Archway Tower Disappear is a publicly sited project by artist Ruth Ewan - a temporary viewer on the Holloway Road and an accompanying artist's book.

