

A Royal occasion



An essay on the nature of the building

*Is this what matters? A plaque scarred by shrapnel,
worn like a medal on the old facade, testament
to the fact that this building remains? Or the way
it has been remade? The spiral staircase, snake-like*

*coils scaled with steps? A field of computer screens
flowering from desks set between the trunks
of tall white pillars? The staccato clatter
of pressed keys and thumbed space bars?*

*The chorus of humming computer towers?
The constant murmur of conversation?
Or the way sound becomes silence
beyond the ends of shelves?*

*Listening to a group of students, their talk
sliding from dissertations and word counts,
to globalisation and nation states,
to how one hadn't left his house in days,*

*and the flowers he'd bought for a girl, I remember
the end of a term, an essay that demanded
words I had yet to find. How it seemed important
to place an orchid on the pages of a book*

*open in front of the girl I was with, to remind us both
of a world beyond the library we sat in.*

*That speckled, yellow bloom, set glowing
against the strict order of paragraphs and white space.*

*Maybe this is what matters. Not the modern wonder
of lights that follow you down unlit passages
or windows that open themselves, but dark
marks on carpet tiles, tell tale of foot fall.*

*A single strand of perfume that runs wild
in the too-clean air. The broken rhythm
of date-stamps marking books for return.
It's not until silence is disturbed*

*by the whisper of a turned page, the rasp
of a cleared throat, or a chair striking
too hard against the edge of a desk,*

*that we know how precious
such silence really is.*

© Jacob Sam-La Rose

Written for the Library at LSE, September 2001

HRH The Princess Royal officially opened LSE's redeveloped Lionel Robbins Building in November last year, declaring it a 'remarkable building' and the result of 'a very bold decision-making process'.

The Princess, chancellor of the University of London, was greeted by the Director and Lord Grabiner QC, chairman of the Court of Governors, before unveiling a plaque and touring the building which is home to LSE's Library and a new Research Lab.

She met students and staff on the tour, including many of the Library team whom she commended for 'moving books not once, but twice, which was an amazing achievement in keeping students happy.'

The Princess also praised the School's outstanding intellectual reputation, and said that, with further plans for campus redevelopment, LSE would certainly 'cement its international reputation.' She added that she felt sure she would meet more alumni in the future who would say LSE had changed their lives – with the redeveloped Library contributing to that process.

More than 250 guests, including students, staff, alumni and friends of the School attended the opening ceremony, during which the Princess Royal spoke to students at work in the Library, part of which remained open throughout.

The building was redeveloped by architects Foster and Partners, at a cost of £30m. It is the first major project completed in the £100m Campaign for LSE. ■