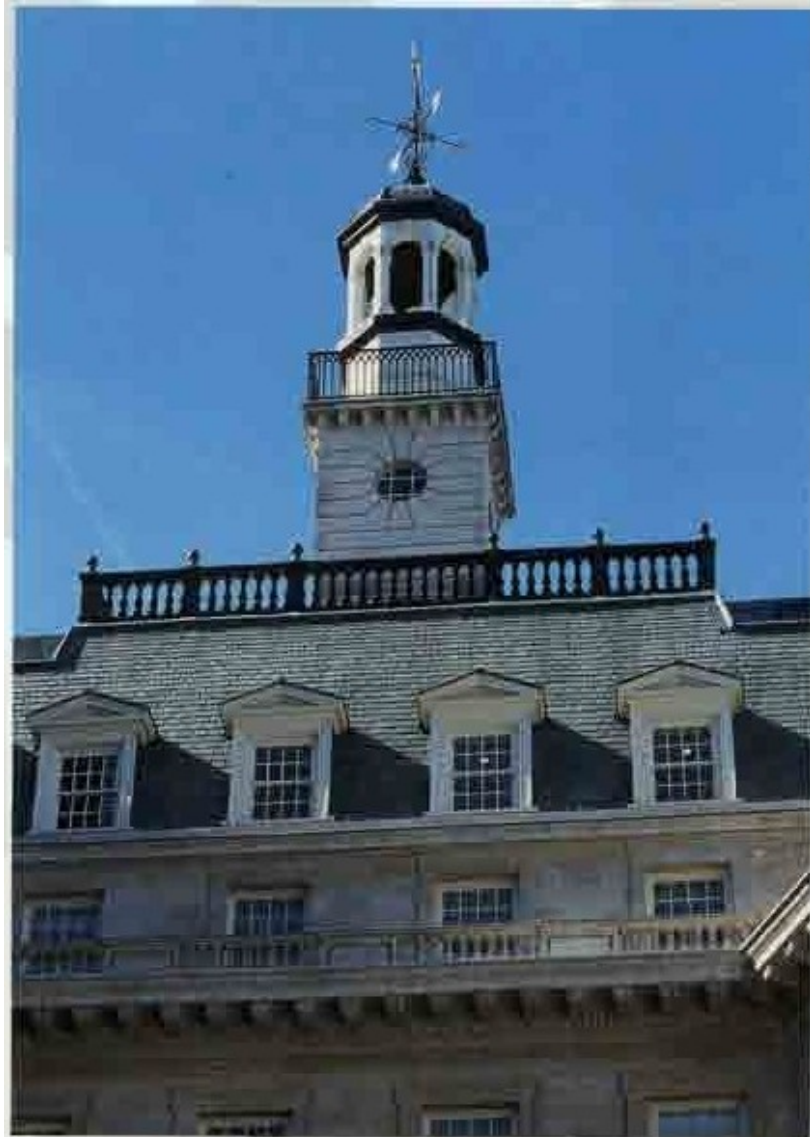


# ST. HELEN'S

## CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER SUMMARY



Department of Planning



CORPORATION  
OF IDAHO



St. Helen's Place



St. Helen's Place



St. Helen's Place



St. Helen's Place



St. Helen's Place



Bishopsgate



St. Helen's Place



St. Helen's Place



St. Helen's Place



St. Helen's Place



St. Helen's Church



Great St. Helen's

# St. Helen's

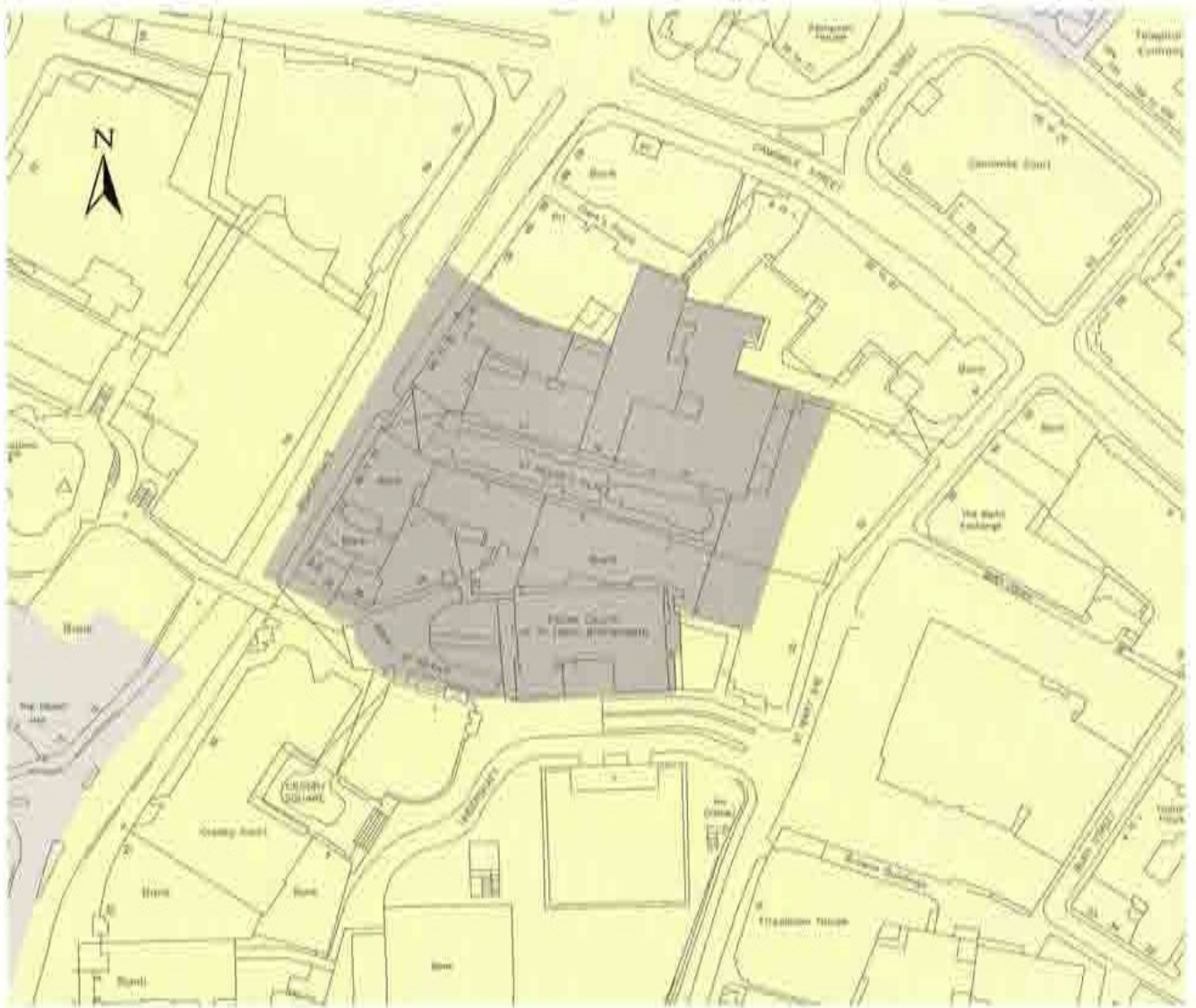
## Conservation Area Character Summary



This conservation area summary of character identifies key characteristics of the area and particular planning considerations.

In the City of London the present urban form and character has evolved through many centuries and is the product of numerous influences and interventions: the character and sense of place is hence unique to that area, contributing at the same time to the wider character of the City. It is inevitable that the present knowledge and information is incomplete, and in the interests of brevity only the principal characteristics of the area are identified here. A more comprehensive appreciation of history and character of the City of London and the nature of conservation area character (with particular reference to the City) are addressed in *Conservation Areas in the City of London. A General Introduction to their Character*.

Each conservation area character summary should be read in conjunction with the General Introduction to enable a potential appreciation of any matters of possible importance in relation to any building, site, street or area. The role of such elements in the character and appearance of any area within the City of London will vary, and will be appraised in the light of particular proposals for alteration, extension or development. It is prepared in the light of national legislation, policy and advice provided in particular by the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and PPG Planning and the Historic Environment 1994, and planning policies for the City of London contained in the City of London Unitary Development Plan 1994.



St. Helen's Conservation Area



St. Helen's Place

# St. Helen's

## Location and Boundaries

St. Helen's Place Conservation Area is a small, tightly defined area on the east side of Bishopsgate, in close proximity to the Bank Conservation Area and the heart of the City. The conservation area is focused primarily on those buildings which enclose, and define the space of St. Helen's Place, and those buildings in Great St. Helen's which contribute to the setting of the Parish Church of St. Helen. It includes the linking group of buildings on the eastern frontage of Bishopsgate. It is bounded by Bishopsgate to the west, Great St. Helen's to the south, and the property boundaries of those buildings enclosing St. Helen's Place to the north and east. The St. Helen's Place Conservation Area lies within the Ward of Bishopsgate.

## Designation

Part of the present area was designated on the 10th December 1981. On the 10th September 1998, the conservation area was extended southwards along Bishopsgate to include Great St. Helen's and the Church of St. Helen Bishopsgate in recognition of its special historic interest and its significant contribution to the evolution of the character of the area as a whole.



Bishopsgate



Great St. Helen's



St. Helen's Place



Great St. Helen's

# Area Character

## Historical Evolution and Key Features

**Bishopsgate** closely follows the alignment of one of the major communication routes laid out by the Romans in the City some time after **60AD**. It connected the Roman Forum and Basilica with the City Gate and on to Lincoln and York. Past excavations in the area have revealed decorative mosaic pavements and have suggested that Roman buildings of high status were aligned at right angles to this important north-south route through the City.

The gate in the City wall through which the Roman road passed became known as Bishopsgate after Bishop Erkenwald who restored it in the late 7th Century. Erkenwald was the brother of Ethelburga to whom the church of the same name is dedicated. Whilst the church is documented from the late-twelfth century, its 7th Century Saint suggests an earlier date.

As the street frontage became fully built up, the Church of St. Helen was established on land to the rear. The Priory of St. Helen was founded on the site for Benedictine Nuns in the early thirteenth century, and shared the Church with the parish. The Church was rebuilt in the same century and extended to include two parallel naves; the southern nave was used by the parishioners, and the northern one by the nuns. It is this Church which largely survives today. The extensive grounds of the irregularly-shaped Priory precinct would have covered most of the conservation area. It was divided into two parts by the Church. The northern half included the cloister, kitchens and service court, whilst the southern part contained tenements.



Archeological Excavation at St. Helen's Place / St. Mary Axe

MOEAS



Southwest Prospect of St. Helen's Church 1736

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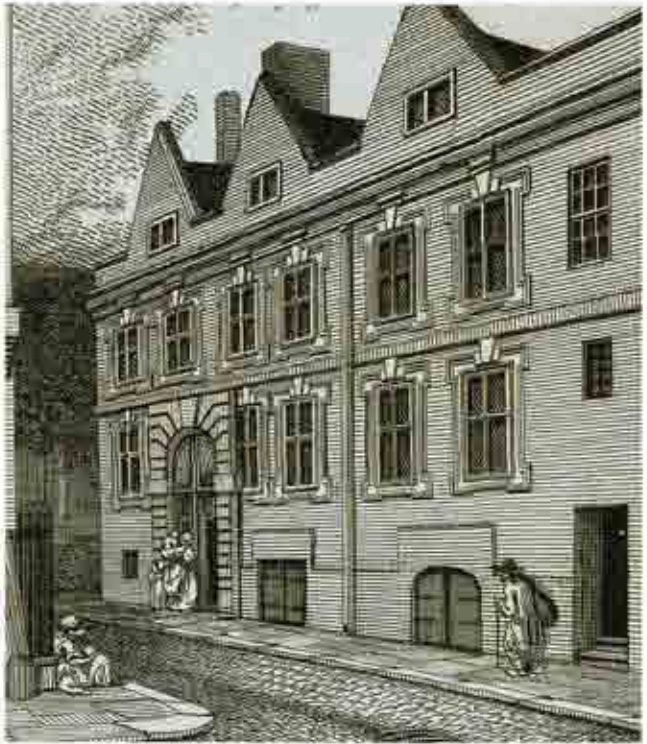


St. Helen's and Leatherseller's Hall 1799

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The main entrance to the Priory was by a gateway called St. Helen's Gate at the junction of Great St. Helen's and Bishopsgate. The other significant space at that time was the churchyard itself, to the west of the Church, which included a graveyard cross and St. Helen's Well in the southern wall. Much of the Priory survived until 1799 when the site was cleared and Great St. Helen's and St. Helen's Place were laid out.

The area of the St. Helen's Place Conservation Area and its environs were well-populated by the Medieval Period. St. Ethelburga's Church was rebuilt in 1390-1400 and extended to include a southern aisle to accommodate a growing population. It remained, despite some later modifications, a church of that date up until its partial destruction by a terrorist bomb in 1993.



The Principal or Street Entrance to Leatherseller's Hall 1799 GUILDHALL LIBRARY



Font at St. Ethelburga's 1920

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St. Ethelburga's 1736

GUILDHALL LIBRARY



Garden at St. Ethelburga's 1920

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The picture is credited:  
"Entirely hidden by St. Ethelburga's, is a delightful garden with goldfish swimming round a fountain and city workers eating their lunch in a cloister."

Two wooden shops were built to the front of St. Ethelburga's Church in 1577 and 1613 over part of the medieval graveyard and the Parish collected the rents from them, as was common practice in the City at that time. They partly obscured the west window and the entrance to the church was through a narrow passage between the shops. They remained until 1929 when as part of a road-widening scheme they were demolished and the west front of the church revealed.

As the area escaped the Great Fire of 1666, (the fire reached the junction of Bishopsgate and Threadneedle Street some 100m away) it retained its wooden houses. In 1720, St. Helen's Place or Little St. Helen's as it was known, still had old timber houses, some occupied by merchants, whilst the houses in Great St. Helen's, described by Strype at the time as "good houses, well inhabited", were focused on the churchyard.



St. Ethelburga's after demolition of shops 1932

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St. Ethelburga's before demolition of shops



St. Ethelburga's during demolition of shops

At the end of the 18th century the area was transformed when the Leatherseller's Hall, adjacent buildings and architectural remains of the priory, were demolished. St. Helen's Place was formally realigned perpendicular to Bishopsgate and rebuilt as two Georgian brick-faced terraces of houses. Tallis described them in 1850 as "handsome private residences".



St. Helen's Place 1911

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Crosby Hall, St. Ethelburga's and St. Helen's 1894 GUILDHALL LIBRARY

In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries densely packed tenements lined both sides of Bishopsgate, and houses with small yards to the rear were constructed on the open areas around the churchyard. On the Bishopsgate frontage large elegant town houses were built which included the splendid estate of Sir John Crosby, built in 1466. It included a gatehouse, tenements, parlours, chapel and garden. It was described by John Stow in his survey more than a century later as Very large and beautiful and the highest at that time in London'. The large medieval hall survived in the City until early in the twentieth century when it was taken down and re-erected in Chelsea in 1910. The tomb of Sir John Crosby and wife with alabaster effigies is located in the Church of St. Helen's.



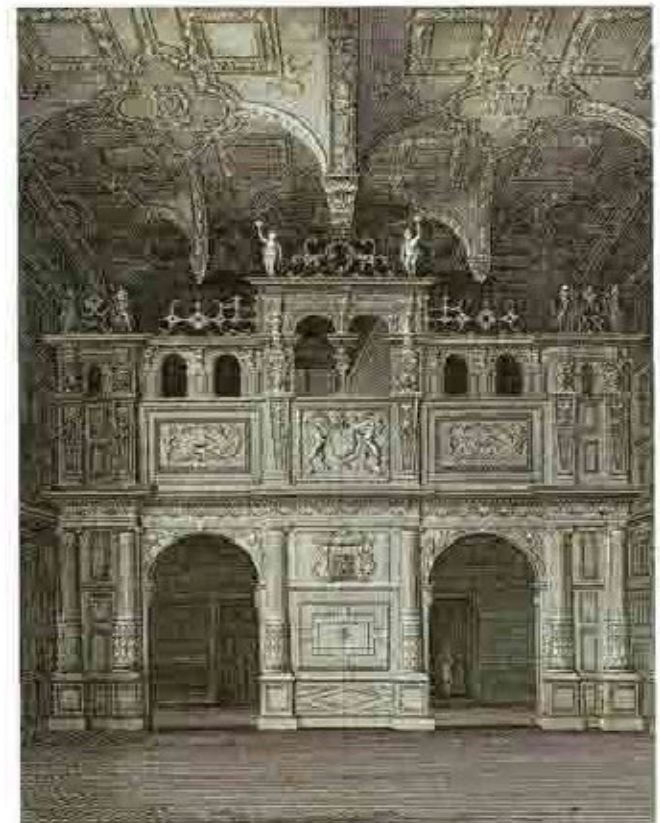
Crypt and Nunnery of St. Helen's 1799 GUILDHALL LIBRARY

The Leatherseller's Company's long association with the area began at the time of the dissolution of the Monasteries, when they purchased the Benedictine Nunnery of St. Helen's from Sir Richard Cromwell in 1543. The nuns' dormitory was then converted into a Hall and the neighbouring buildings were let. Almshouses were established in the old timber yard by 1544. Most of the Priory buildings were adapted and re-used rather than replaced.

Bishopsgate and its immediate hinterland was still crowded by closely-grouped substantial houses which remained until they were rebuilt in the late 16th century.



Leatherseller's Hall 1799 GUILDHALL LIBRARY



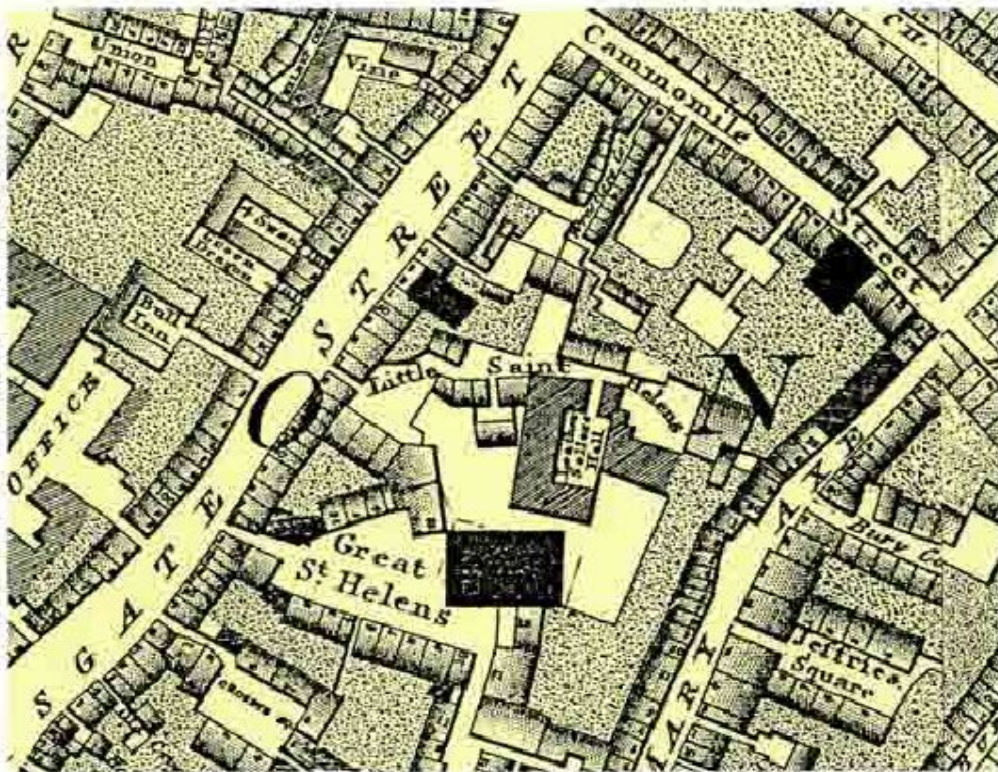
Leatherseller's Hall Interior 1799 GUILDHALL LIBRARY



Ogilby and Morgan 1676-79

GUILDHALL LIBRARY

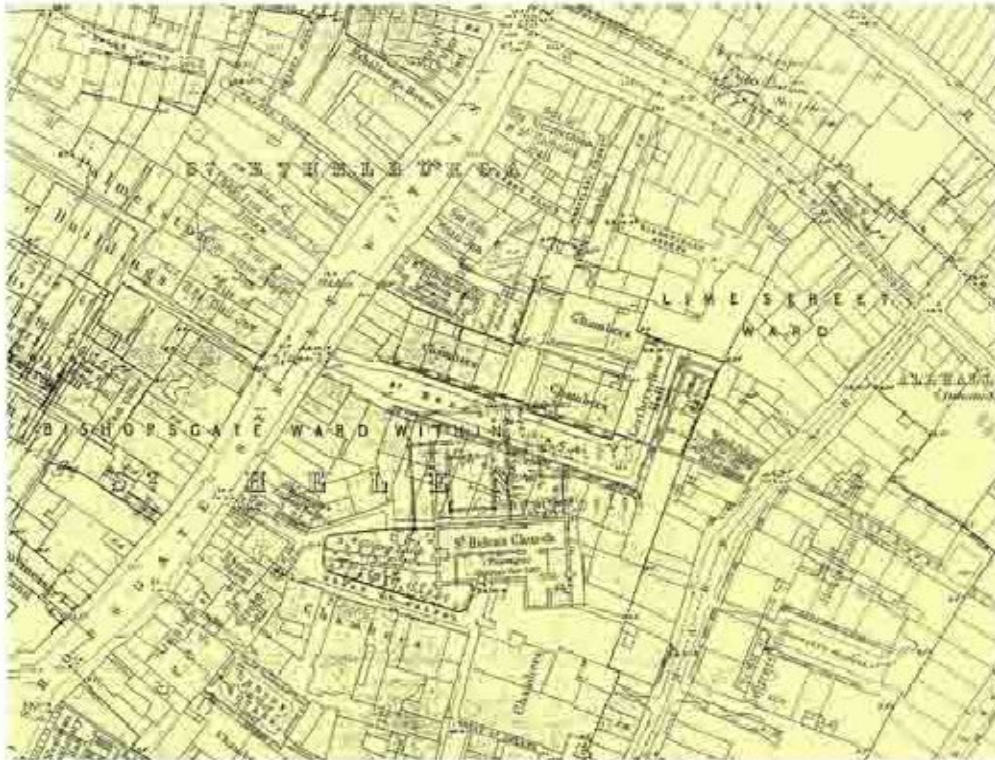
Undertaken when the reconstruction of the City was well underway, the Plan is the "first large multi-sheet plan of a British town to be so delineated", and is considered to be relatively accurate; plans before this had been aerial pictorial views. The plan shows the well-established thoroughfares of **Bishopsgate** and **Mary Axe** bordering the area. The Bishopsgate frontage is built-up of closely grouped tenements with the two routes, Little St. Helen's and Great St. Helen's leading to Leathersellers Hall and St. Helen's Church and the important associated spaces St. Helen's Churchyard, the cloisters and gardens.



Richard Horwood 1792-95

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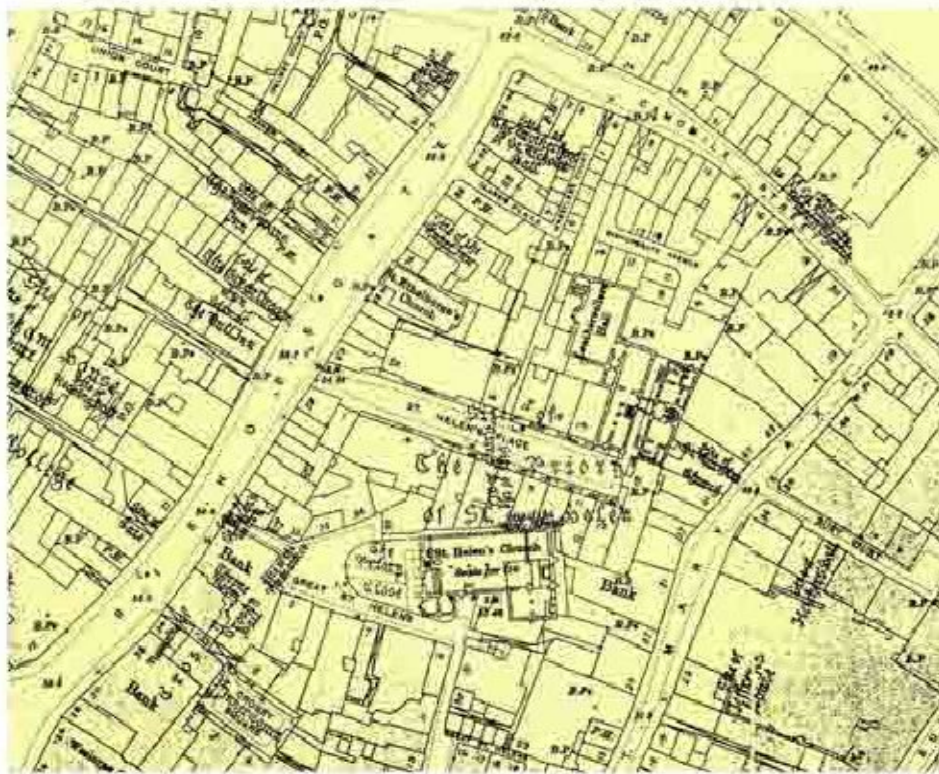
The largest and most important London map of the eighteenth century, although rather less precise. The plan shows the dominant influence on the form of the area of both the Leatherseller's Hall (immediately prior to demolition) and the Church of St. Helen's. Many of the timber houses in the area, especially in Little St. Helen's and along the Bishopsgate frontage were destroyed in the Bishopsgate Fire of **1765**. Bishopsgate is renewed with Georgian **façades**.



Ordnance Survey 1873

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The plan shows Little St. Helen's extinguished and St. Helen's Place laid-out as a formal Georgian street with a narrowed, gated entrance at Bishopsgate. The fourth Leatherseller's Hall (1822) is seen at the eastern end of St. Helen's Place. It replaced the earlier hall on the same site. St. Ethelburga's churchyard is reduced to a garden, and St. Helen's Church remains tightly bound by development.



Ordnance Survey 1930

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The plan shows the beginnings of the last major alterations to the conservation area with the complete redevelopment of St. Helen's Place. The new scale introduced into the area is evident in the two new plots at the western end of the street. The fifth Leatherseller's Hall destroyed in May 1941 can be seen behind the buildings on the north side of St. Helen's Place.



Bishopsgate 1905

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St. Helen's Place 1911

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Great St. Helen's 1890

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The access from Bishopsgate was protected by wrought iron gates and railings to provide privacy and increase the grandeur of the new street. The Leatherseller's Company moved to a merchant's house in the north east corner of the St. Helen's estate, and remain adjacent to this site today. When the Leatherseller's Company rebuilt their hall around it too was screened by gates and railings, and gave one of two access points off St. Helen's Place on the northern side to the premises behind the street. The other gave access to St.

#### Ethelburga's Churchyard.

None of the buildings survive from this period, but with the exception of the two northern alleys, the street layout remains. This layout of the planned enclave, entirely characteristic of its era but unusual in the City, was then retained following wholesale redevelopment in the 1920's. It is this townscape form which is the essential characteristic of the conservation area.

The effect of this radical townscape change in the late eighteenth century, was that for the first time the Church of St. Helen was disconnected from the area formerly occupied by the Priory to the north.

Great St. Helen's remained the major access point onto Bishopsgate, giving both access to the Church and churchyard, and a whole series of alleyways to the south and east, but links to the north were severed.

The churchyard to the west of the Church remained the focus of the surrounding development and determined the building alignment of the enclosing facades. The Church remained tightly enclosed by adjoining buildings.



Great St. Helen's 1885

GUILDHALL LIBRARY

The Georgian street of St. Helen's Place remained largely intact until all the buildings, which were amongst the last of the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century residential buildings to survive in the City of London, were replaced between the World Wars. The Surveyor to the **Leatherseller's** Company, Henry Saul, rebuilt their hall and premises on the north side as no. 15 in 1926 and was responsible for most of the new buildings in the street. By 1930 the whole of the south side had been redeveloped.

All the new buildings were of similar scale and height, of around five storeys plus a roof storey, and adopted a neo-classical style faced in Portland stone thereby perpetuating the homogenous character of St. Helen's Place.

The most radical change at this time was building over the entrance to St. Helen's Place and introducing a continuous frontage to Bishopsgate by Mewes & Davis for the Hudson Bay Company. These origins remain expressed in the **facade**. The entablature supported by the giant Doric pilasters of the ground and first floors, includes Canadian frontier motives such as carved wolves' heads. As far as the conservation area is concerned, the route through the building into St. Helen's Place remained screened, but is celebrated by fine wrought iron gates, a plaster **soffite** with the arms of the Leatherseller's Company and impressive hanging lanterns. As well as providing a prominent frontage of grandeur onto Bishopsgate, the architects recognised the importance and axial quality of St. Helen's Place by using the central bay of the main **facade** crowned by a square turret and cupola with beaver **weathervane**, as a fitting focus to the western vista along the street.



St. Helen's Place 1923

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Bishopsgate 1973

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Bishopsgate



Bishopsgate



Bishopsgate



St. Helen's Place

These imposing early twentieth century buildings are a dignified group of consistent scale, architectural character and materials, and provide a pleasing harmony and a human scale in a place which has such a strong commercial character. The richness of the frontages, some 100m in length, provides the backdrop, which defines and encloses St. Helen's Place - a space of distinction.

The privately-owned St. Helen's Place remains the centrepiece of this planned enclave. Its semi-pedestrianised character and sense of enclosure was reinforced by a recent townscape scheme undertaken by the Leatherseller's Company which rationalised the carriageway using high quality traditional materials such as York stone and granite setts, and re-introduced street lamp columns.



St. Helen's Place



St. Helen's Place



St. Helen's Place



Great St. Helen's

Great St. Helen's is the sole survivor of an intricate pattern of spaces and alleys which once connected Bishopsgate and St. Mary Axe. It now only survives and remains enclosed for a very short stretch to provide the setting for the churchyard. The churchyard is a small triangular green space with two important trees, which remains intimate in scale despite the contrasting townscape to the south. It is a remarkably quiet oasis at such a short distance from the busy Bishopsgate frontage. The building alignment and plot width of those buildings within the conservation area, framing the churchyard to the north, have remained relatively intact. The grain of the physical fabric provides a cohesive and modest scale in Great St. Helen's which is also reflected in those buildings within the conservation area on Bishopsgate. Whilst the more recent buildings may have introduced variations in architectural expression, they have generally adopted a scale and height which have assisted their assimilation into the area.

Unlike St. Helen's Place, this is an active space and a through route much used by City workers. Beyond the churchyard, the space is no longer enclosed. Adjoining redevelopment schemes have resulted in the south and east elevations of the Church being exposed and the space leaking around the lower storeys of the dramatically larger scale office buildings from recent decades.

St. Helen's Church remains arguably one of the most important pieces of medieval fabric surviving in the City. Its 13th Century origins are still to be seen, but the physical manifestation of the building's organic history is also evident. The list description includes the statement that the interior is remarkable for its fittings, especially monuments, some of which are from the demolished Church of St. Martin *Outwich*. It also refers to the 15th Century pulpit and choir stalls, 17th Century font and cover, 18th Century organ case, 19th Century pavement of marble and tiles, and other features. A radical and extensive scheme of repair and reordering was recently implemented in response to both damage to the church, and the requirements and size of the congregation.



Great St. Helen's



Great St. Helen's



St. Helen's Church



St. Helen's Church 1890

GUILDHALL LIBRARY



St. Helen's Church 1995

GUILDHALL LIBRARY



46 Bishopsgate



St. Ethelburga's Church 1982



52-68 Bishopsgate



48 Bishopsgate

## Listed Buildings and Scheduled Monuments

- 46 Bishopsgate
- 48 Bishopsgate
- 52-68 Bishopsgate
- St. Ethelburga's Church, Bishopsgate
- St. Helen's Church, Great St. Helen's

## Additional Considerations

Both of the nationally important pre-Fire Churches within the conservation area have been seriously damaged in recent years. In April 1992, a terrorist bomb planted in St. Mary Axe badly damaged St. Helen's Church. The roof was raised in the blast and not returned to its true position, windows were blown out and stonework destroyed, and a number of important monuments, for which the church is renowned, were seriously damaged.

One year later, a further bomb planted in Bishopsgate destroyed the west wall, west tower, roof, and most of the north wall of St. Ethelburga's Church. It also caused severe destruction to the listed 52-68 Bishopsgate and widespread damage to surrounding properties both within the conservation area and in the vicinity. As a result, much of the conservation area, and in particular its Bishopsgate frontage, has been **subject** to extensive repair and rebuilding in replica, thereby ensuring that its architectural character is maintained.

The northern part of the conservation area is an area of potential archaeological remains of particular importance.



St. Helen's Church





St. Helen's Church



St. Helen's Church



St. Helen's Church



52-68 Bishopsgate



Leatherseller's Hall



Leatherseller's Hall



Leatherseller's Hall

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# References

The brief quote in the reference to the Ogilby and Morgan plan is taken from the introduction to this series of maps by Ralph Hyde, Guildhall Library. The brief quote in the reference to the 1792-99 Horwood map is taken from 'Printed Maps of London circa 1553-1850' by James Howgego. Readers are also referred to the sources mentioned in the General Introduction to this series on the Character of the City's Conservation Areas.

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St. Helen's Place

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