

Feltmakers' Hall

The Great Fire 1666

Liveryman Alastair Hay has presented a report to the Historical Committee concerning his researches to identify the precise location of our Hall.

He points out that in the 16th and 17th Centuries Livery Halls were not the impressive facilities we see today but frequently functional warehouses and stores located near to the river. In many instances the Court of the Livery would meet in an upstairs room to deliberate on trade issues, infringements and disputes. It is probable that the Feltmakers' Hall was leased or rented which was common at that time.

In 1666 the City covered about one square mile with a population of 80,000 people. It was a chaotic and unpleasant place with houses for the rich and for the poor in buildings close together and arranged in haphazard terraces often almost touching one another. The site of the Feltmakers' Hall was in St Peters Hill not far from a bakers premises in Pudding Lane where in the early hours of Sunday 6th September 1666 the fateful fire started. The timber framed properties had no hope and the strong and veering winds spread the fire along the water front and our Hall was engulfed sometime on the Monday afternoon.

The Fire destroyed 13200 houses, many important buildings including The Royal Exchange, The Customs House, The Guildhall, St Pauls, 87 parish churches and the Halls of 44 livery companies.

There is a reference in a survey of building sites in the city after the Great Fire which describes:-

"Mr William Colman 8th March 1668. One foundation set out this day said situate on St Peters Hill belonging to the said Mr Colman, formerly the Feltmakers Hall....."

Alastair Hay then remarkably tracked

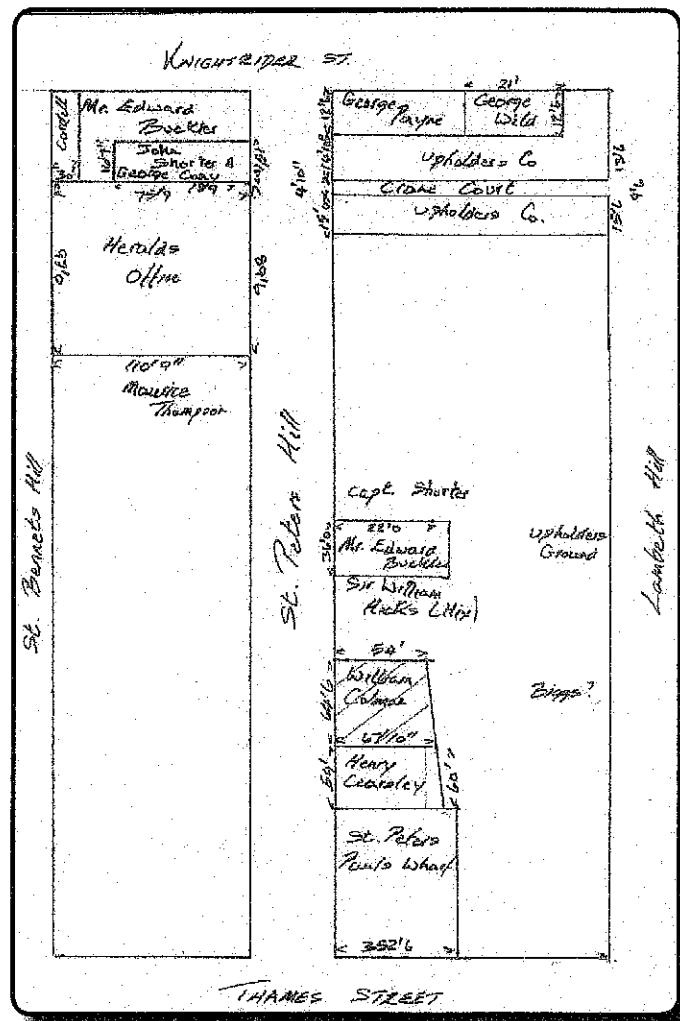
through the major reconstructions and rebuilding of the City from the aftermath of the fire, through the Georgian and Victorian periods and the Blitz of the 1940's.

This was a period of huge change to the river frontage and the removal of unsightly wharves and crossing points. Victoria Street did not exist until the further 'grandification' of the City in the Victorian period and was built in 1870/1880 and cut across St Peters Hill. His detailed researches of documents and maps confirmed that St Peters Hill is now Peters Hill which runs

from St Paul's Cathedral crossing Queen Victoria Street via a pedestrian crossing and then over Upper Thames Street by way of a bridge leading directly to the Millennium foot bridge over the river.

Because of the significant changes made in road patterns and buildings it has proved difficult to make a precise location of the Hall but it is to the South

and East of the College of Arms, due south of the Upholders Company and due North of the Church of St Peters, Paul's Wharf. The current land use on this side comprises Millennium Bridge House and the headquarters of the Sal-



vation Army with Peters Hill dissected by Queen Victoria Street.

The conclusion is that the location of the Hall to within 100 metres, is somewhere in the vicinity of the Salvation Army building although in fact it may be in the middle of Queen Victoria Street!

Tony Skrimshire
Member Historical Committee