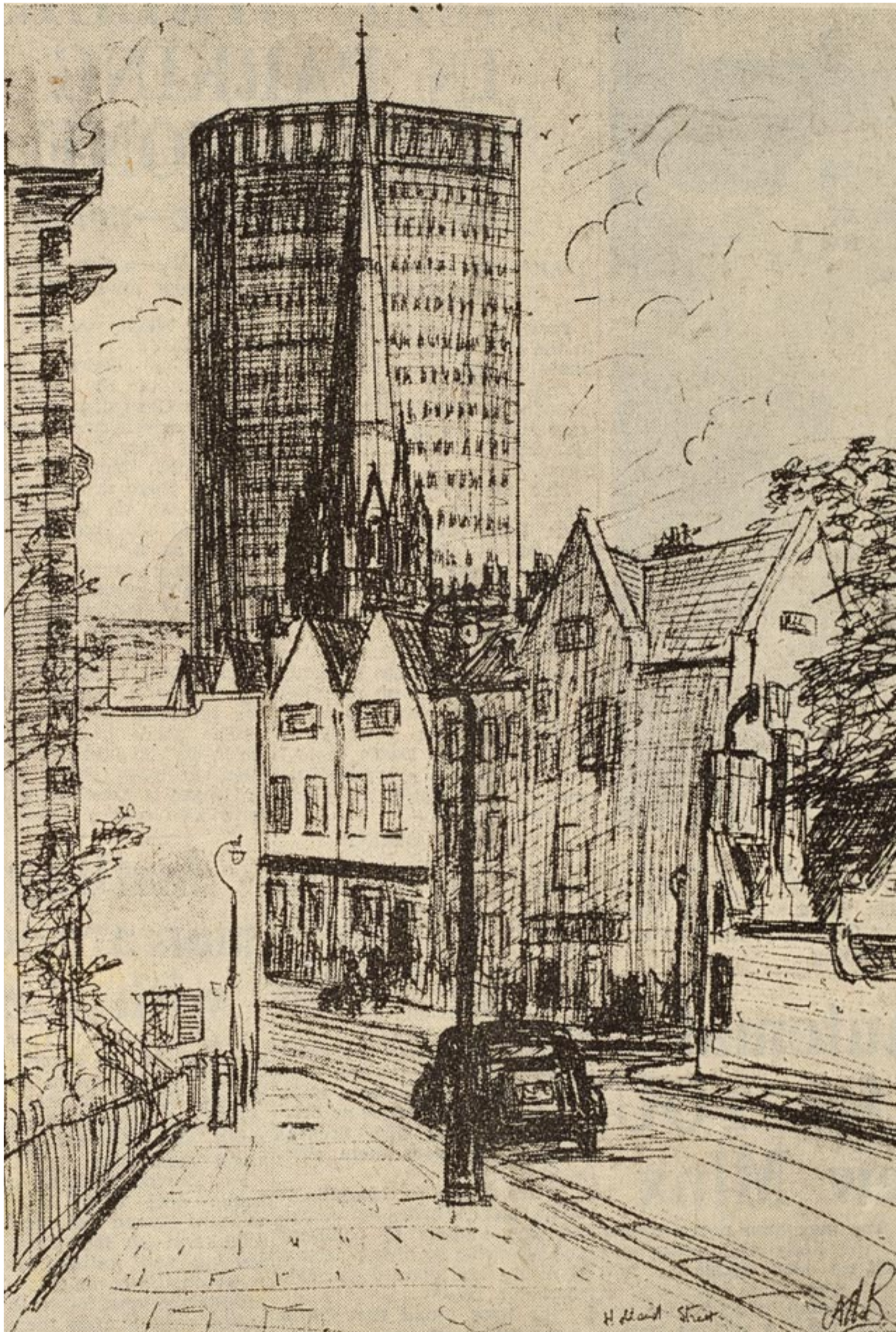


Towers and Traumas



Amongst the rapid succession of work brought by the barbaric 1960s and the building boom of the early 1970s was the campaign to retain old lamp-posts (concrete lamp-posts were threatened and in some places put up), and the reduction to an acceptable height of the new Plane Tree House overlooking Holland Park. The Society also successfully opposed in the mid-1960s an immense development of three towers, two of 290 feet (88.5m), and one of 240 feet (73m), (22 and 17 storeys respectively), over Kensington High Street underground station. This proposal, supported by the then Kensington Borough Council, was rightly held by the Society 'to involve a disastrous mutilation of the unique village character of this part of Kensington'. In the end only one block, a broad 12 storey hotel, 150 feet (45.75m) high, was built in Wrights Lane.

Such applications became a feature of the time, with another series of tower blocks proposed in the late 1960s for the Thames Water site on Campden Hill of 100 feet (30.5m); and, far worse, a 2000 bed soviet-style hotel in Cromwell Road 415 feet (126.5m) high, linked to the then West London Air Terminal by a bridge over the road. The 5½ acre (2.3h) site would have made it the largest hotel in Europe. Another such proposal in the early 1970s was a 900 bed hotel, with two cinemas, restaurant and shops on the Odeon and its adjacent site in Kensington High Street.

Perhaps the most brutalist of all such ideas was the earlier 23 storey elliptical office tower, 272 feet (83m) high on the corner of Kensington Church Street and Kensington High Street, opposite St Mary Abbots, whose spire stands at a lesser 264 feet (80.5m). This, to be backed eastward by a high office building along Kensington High Street, was described in 1959 by Lord Esher, President of the Society, as a 'barbarous proposal to dwarf the spire of St Mary Abbots, the central feature of Kensington'. The public meeting called by the Society together with extensive public opposition quashed the proposal, but not without considerable effort. Many other such proposals emerged during this particularly desperate period.