

# History of the London Festival of Architecture

## From cattle to geese, the full history of how it all began...



The first manifestation of the Festival was in 2004 as the London Architecture Biennale (LAB) with a series of events focused on the Clerkenwell area. Clerkenwell is home to more architects per square metre than any other place in the world and the Biennale was seen as a one off event largely aimed at a local audience.

LAB was set up as a contrast to the Venice Biennale, where the world's architectural community congregates, but the event has very little relationship to the place or community of the city. The London biennale was designed to be embedded in the city - past and present. Its programme designed to celebrate the delights of the historical capital, to focus on its role as a creative hub and to posit ideas for its future.

Some 15000 people turned out for the opening event in St John Street when a herd of long horn cows were driven down to Smithfield market to recreate the movement of livestock that occurred there until the 17th century and which was responsible for forming the plan and activities of the area. While many of the spectators were drawn to the spectacle of the cows they also took in the exhibitions on contemporary architecture, and the walks and talks that took place at the same time.



In 2006 events were held along a route linking Borough, south of the River Thames, with Kings Cross in the north. The animal theme was repeated with a sheep drive across the Millennium Bridge with Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers as shepherds. The serious message of this event was to highlight the impact of the construction of the new bridge on the economy and the planning of the area around Bankside and St Paul's cathedral. Again the public turned out in their thousands and also enjoyed the range of exhibitions, open studios, walks, tours and bicycle rides. The Student Architecture Festival joined in to deliver a series of installations along the route.

It was becoming clear, as popular interest in the Festival grew, that the word 'biennale', while familiar to the art and architecture community, has little resonance with a wider audience and the decision was taken to change the name to the London Festival of Architecture.

In 2008 the buzz of activity moved across five key areas or 'Hubs', with largescale public events taking place in a different Hub each weekend. Each of the Hubs covered an area with a very different character - historic, present and future - and full of different institutions and activities.



Headline events included lectures by leading international architects David Chipperfield, Daniel Libeskind, Cesar Pelli and Rem Koolhaas and by former LFA President, Peter Ackroyd as well as Big Breakfasts at spectacular venues such as the British Museum, with speakers including Jon Snow and Janet Street-Porter sharing their views of London.

Specially commissioned pavilions provided platforms for debate and performance, while specially designed street furniture invited passers by to take a seat and look with fresh eyes at London's public spaces.

For the first time the event included an international dimension. Since London's diplomatic status is a key part of its make up, and international diversity is a strength of the local architectural scene, the Festival organised events that would have a global perspective yet still remain true to the desire to be embedded in the city and its community. International embassies exhibited architecture from their particular countries, and temporary installations occupied streets across the city as part of the National Architecture Student Festival.