

Architecture And Mortality

by Mark Hibbett, www.markhibbett.com

A street with three buildings - ROSE (an old pub, female), WILSON (a brutalist convention centre, male) and SWANNY (a young office block, female). Rose and Wilson are next to each other, with a gap between Wilson and Swanny.

All three are asleep. Swanny wakes up and looks around.

SWANNY

Regal? Regal?

She becomes distressed.

SWANNY

Wilson! Wake up!

Wilson wakes up, grumpily.

WILSON

Eh? What?

SWANNY

Where's Regal gone?

WILSON

Knocked down.

SWANNY

How do you mean?

WILSON

Demolished. You saw the cranes come in, what did you think was happening?

SWANNY

I never seen 'em before.

WILSON

Well, you have now. The Regal Theatre has been demolished. Cleared for future buildings. Yet another office block I expect. No offence.

SWANNY

So where's he gone to? When's he back?

WILSON

I haven't got time for this, got a conference in the Callaghan Suite this morning. Ask Rose.

SWANNY

Does Rose know where he's gone then?

WILSON

Rose doesn't know where Rose has gone most days, but better her than me having to tell you. Rose! You daft old pub, wake up!

He nudges her.

ROSE

Is that you, Baker?

WILSON

(to Swanny) I've only been here fifty years, you might think she'd remember me by now. No dear, it's The Wilson Convention Centre, the bakery collapsed in the 1920s didn't it?

ROSE

Ooh, the smell of buns in the morning!

SWANNY

Rose, where's Regal?

ROSE

Who's that then?

WILSON

The Regal Theatre dear, next door to me.

ROSE

Oh, the moving picture palace?

WILSON *(with a massive sigh)* Yes, a long long time ago he was a cinema, then he was a bingo hall -

ROSE Too much shouting.

WILSON ...and then he was a concert venue.

ROSE Oh I liked that, all those young people around. What's the matter with him then?

SWANNY Wilson says he's been knocked down.

ROSE Has he? Well, he had a good run didn't he? Seventy years more or less, not bad these days.

WILSON Not bad at all.

SWANNY Is that why all them people were shouting?

ROSE What's that then?

WILSON They had a sit in, old customers. Didn't want it knocking down.

ROSE No, well, people are like that. They think it's their youth getting knocked down don't they? Don't want to make way for someone else's.

SWANNY So is he gone forever then? Do we all have to go? Do I?

WILSON Jesus H Chrysler Building, are you thick or something?

ROSE Leave her alone, she doesn't know. Don't be sad little'un. There was a whole row of shops on your plot before you came along, if they hadn't been knocked down we wouldn't have had you would we?

SWANNY There were buildings here before me?

ROSE Dear me, course there were love. And before them - all the way back to the old farm, before there was even a street. Course, that was when I was very young. I'm the third oldest pub in London you know.

WILSON We know.

ROSE There's that trollop over Whitechapel way says she is, but I remember. All the way back to the great fire I go.

SWANNY Great fire?

WILSON Don't -

ROSE Wiped out most all the buildings there was round here. They come along every so often these fires, keeps us all on our toes. Wilson was after one of them weren't you?

WILSON No, I think you'll find that I was built as part of a drive to modernity and functionality in a time of forward thinking social architecture.

ROSE I thought it were the Luftwaffe, flattened half of Soho.

SWANNY The what waffe?

ROSE Aeroplanes, they said, felt like a fire to me. It's always a fire, be it bombs or arson or a new idea about how to live, comes for us all in the end. All you can do is make the most of the time you're here.

WILSON Easy for her to say - she's listed.

SWANNY Listed?

ROSE I'm the third oldest pub in London, I am.

WILSON We know.

ROSE Whatever that trollop in Whitechapel says. Wilson's listed too now, aren't you love?

WILSON Not listed as such. "Special Architectural Interest". It's my air conditioning system, nothing else like it in Europe you know.

ROSE We know.

SWANNY Does that mean you and Wilson'll live forever then?

ROSE Goodness me no.

WILSON "Accidents" happen. Or "Developers" as they call them now

ROSE Fires don't check who's listed.

SWANNY So we're all going to die?

ROSE Yes love, we're all going to die. But we're all going to live first aren't we?

WILSON Fact is young lady, if London didn't change all the time, well...
Rose and Wilson look at each other.

ROSE We'd be Paris.
They all shudder.

ROSE Anyway, don't worry yourself, you're new, you've got plenty of time.

WILSON She's right - brand new block like you, who knows? Maybe one day you'll be a prime example of an architectural school, like I am.

SWANNY Yes. Maybe I could be. My windows are nice, everyone says so.

WILSON For an office block.

ROSE That's the spirit. Feeling better now?

SWANNY I think so.

ROSE And next time, anything you want to know, just ask your Auntie Rosie, all right?

SWANNY Well, there is one other thing.

ROSE What's that?

SWANNY Some bloke came by with some leaflets yesterday. I just wondered -

WILSON Yes?

SWANNY What's Crossrail?