

Seventeenth century London

Part 4

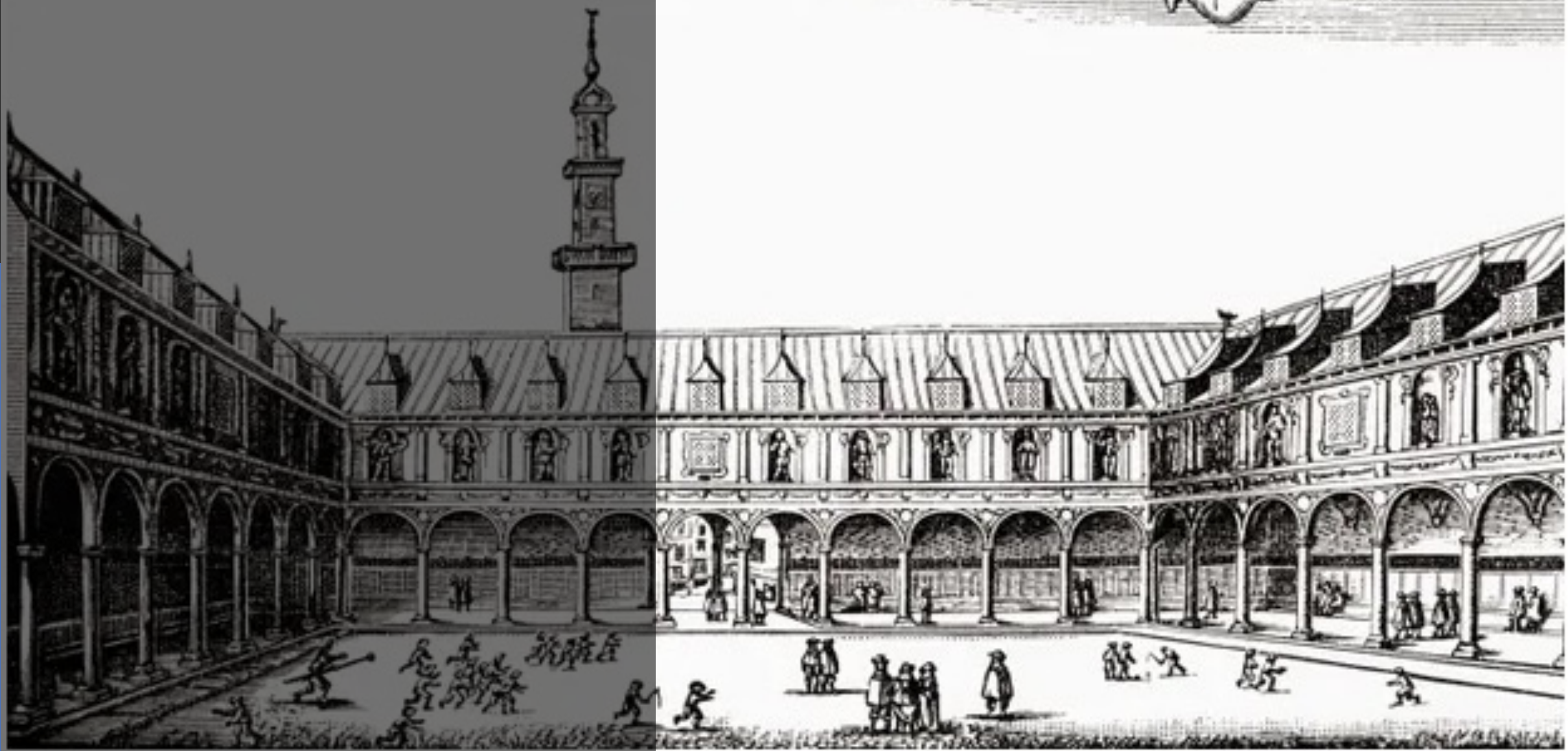


The statue in the road

A South African by birth, James Henry Greathead arrived in England in 1859, aged fifteen, in 1859, and set about training as an engineer. In 1884, Greathead was appointed engineer on the London (City) and Southwark Subway, which later became the City and South London Railway, which is now part of **the Northern Line**.

This line has the distinction of being the world's first underground electric railway, and it was Greathead's ingenuity that made it possible. his greatest invention was the "Greathead Shield" - also known as the "Travelling Shield" - a one piece, circular tunneling device that made possible the excavation of the deep level underground tunnels which enable use to be whisked, deep beneath the streets, from one end of London to another in the blink of an eye.

Byrsa Londinensis vulgo the Royal Exchange.



A vast, open-air trading piazza was the brainchild of the merchant **Thomas Gresham**. Opened as the Royal Exchange by Queen Elizabeth I in 1571, it became the epicentre of England's burgeoning trading empire.

Along its colonnaded walks and finely pebbled courtyard, merchants from all over the world, customers and suppliers would meet twice a day to seal deals that would send ships to the four corners of the world.

It was a broad, four-storey building with fine shops in its upper galleries, and a bell tower surmounted by a large grasshopper, the emblem of the Gresham family. Watching from niches above the colonnade were statues of all the English kings and queens since William the Conqueror.

The Great Fire swept through the Exchange on Monday, 3rd September, filling the courtyard with "sheets of fire" and sending the kings and queens plummeting from their niches, smashing to pieces below.

It's akin to the City's modern-day financial district going up in smoke.

The Exchange was surrounded by a large manufacturing area. The East India Trading Company's stocks of spices and pepper led to a curious smell in the air.

As an emblem of England's commercial strength, it was soon rebuilt after the fire, reopening in 1669. But this new building was also destroyed by fire in 1838, and the site is currently occupied by the third exchange.

The Merchant Tailors Hall in Threadneedle Street is a trade guild that represented tailors. Inside the existing building, the old medieval walls and ceiling still exist showing where the fire reached.

