

CITY HERITAGE SOCIETY

ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2003

Approval this year for the majority of the new schemes

There were fewer planning applications for the Society to scrutinize in 2003 than in recent years, reflecting the severe downturn in demand for office accommodation and, presumably, acceptance by developers that it would be sensible to allow some of the vast amount of empty space in the City and roundabout to be taken up before embarking on still more speculative building.

Of 22 City proposals examined we said that seven of the schemes would result in better buildings than those existing; two schemes were welcome conversions from redundant office blocks to residential; and four were for excellent schemes of refurbishment. Three of the applications were revisions involving improvements, some of them suggested earlier by the Society. There were six projects in the City, and one outside, which we disliked.

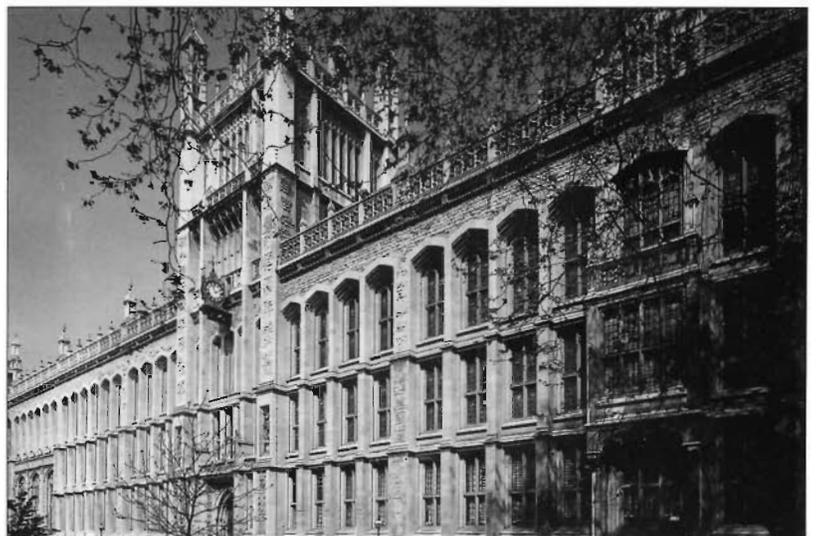
We were particularly pleased to be invited by surveyors Montagu Evans to consider revised proposals by Land Securities for development of their very large site lying between Fetter Lane and Shoe Lane, north of Fleet Street. In 2001 we had been severely critical of an earlier scheme involving replacement of eight substantial buildings with a single monolithic structure which in our view would have been an architectural and planning disaster. The nub of our argument was that this extensive site needed to have a number of quite separate buildings on it. The new proposals are, in fact, for five distinctly separate buildings varying in bulk, height and style. We have commended this new approach but have made a number of suggestions for changes to make it still more acceptable. One feature in particular we find objectionable and that is the proposal to reroute traffic along a widened Pemberton Row which, we have said, would destroy the historic and peaceful setting of this City backwater leading on to Dr Johnson's House in Gough Square.

Minerva tower

The scheme we most disliked was for the 50-storey "Minerva" tower on Aldgate roundabout, a project we had condemned a year earlier and which came back to us in a slightly revised form in the summer of 2003. The revision lowered the secondary, minor,

block by nine storeys to 14 but left the main tower proposal of 50 storeys unchanged and it was this skyscraper to which we objected in 2002 and did so again in 2003. The applicant's claim that a building of some 90,000 m² was required to satisfy "projected demand" by banks and insurers seems to us bizarre when almost all financial institutions had been making substantial cuts in their workforce. In writing to the City Planning Officer we said: "The truth is that this would be yet another speculative office development for which there is almost certainly no single occupant now, nor is there likely to be in the future. As with other large buildings nearing completion in the City the developers will be scratching around to find tenants for much of the space." Swiss Re's Gherkin, built to hold 4,000 or more, is assured at the moment of no more than 800 occupants — i.e. Swiss Re's own City staff!

Our chief cause for concern with the kind of mega developments we so dislike (such as the Minerva tower) is that they take large and valuable commercial spaces out of circulation for years at a stretch, first during the lengthy time the scheme is put together and makes its way through the planning process (often with a public enquiry), then while the developer awaits a more propitious moment to build — wasted time and wasted opportunities for the erection on these sites of the more modest buildings which, in today's climate, would have far greater chance of being profitably occupied.



City Heritage Award winner: The former Public Record Office, now the Maughan Library

Relations with English Heritage

Members will learn with pleasure that under its new Chairman, Sir Neil Cossens, the Society has established a closer working relationship with the officers of English Heritage's London Region. Concern that English Heritage were not calling for a public enquiry into the Minerva tower (as we had already done) has been allayed in correspondence with Sir Neil. We know that English Heritage do not approve the scheme (particularly because of its adverse effects on views to and from the Tower of London World Heritage Site). Should the Secretary of State call it in, English Heritage would appear as an objector.

We are, however, far from sanguine about the outcome with Minerva tower, particularly now that Mr Prescott has given the go-ahead for the building of the "shard of glass" at London Bridge Station — which at 1,000 ft would be Europe's tallest building. English Heritage (and City Heritage) had condemned the scheme for its effect on views of St Paul's and the Tower of London and it had been widely expected that the application would be rejected. But the Deputy Prime Minister appears to be as uncaring for the once precious place of St Paul's in the London skyline as is London's Mayor.



Presentation at the Maughan Library: Prof. Arthur Lucas, Principal of King's College; Lord Mayor Gavyn Arthur; City Heritage Chairman Douglas Woodward

Comments on 21 other planning applications

Labyrinth by St Giles Church We have serious concerns about the appropriateness of such a feature in close proximity to the Grade II* listed church and Grade II listed Barbican. There could be intrusive noise in the churchyard area with disturbance to residents.

40 Holborn Viaduct Promise of acceptable new office block and removal of ugly bridge across Charterhouse Street. We urge that Portland stone is chosen for cladding.

71 Lombard Street Alas Lloyds TSB are leaving their handsome headquarters building (recipient of City Heritage Award 1999). Ground-floor banking hall to be refurbished for new use.

Walbrook Wharf, Upper Thames Street Acceptable new office building, superior to that existing.

5 Cheapside Far and away the best of the three applications for this site, retaining and improving the seven-storey octagon of 1971.

24 Cornhill Impressive classical facade of 1929 and galleried entrance hall which should be restored. Hotel rather than office plus retail use preferred.

15 Bishopsgate Proposed replacement some improvement on existing bank building and the ugly bridge across Bishopsgate would go. Question extra storey and its effect on neighbouring Gibson Hall.

3-5 Middle Street Applaud change to residential.

Mariner House, Pepys Street Photomontages suggest something better than the old Mariner House.

Site bounded by Breems Buildings etc

The modest jewel is No 8 Breems Buildings of 1899, the facade of which, thanks to advice of City Planning Officer, is largely retained. Replacement building far superior to existing Rolls House and Arnold House and building would be broken down into a number of individual facades to dispel monotony.

35 Basinghall Street With addition of 16 Coleman Street total floorspace up from 10,000 to 25,400 m², another huge speculative office block. Our criticism of original application was that it was at least one storey too high and is even more true of this larger scheme. (We were pleased that at least the height of the lift motor room was later to be lowered.)

1 Seething Lane Welcome changes from an earlier scheme, particularly the decrease in height, somewhat better materials and greater attention to St Olave's Church.

21 Moorfields Commendable architectural approach to a complex and difficult site spanning Moorgate underground station and its tracks. But the proposal is wrong for this site, going completely against the existing style of low-rise buildings, and the open courtyard and walkway. The "state-of-the-art" creation proposed in aluminium and glass, a vast complex of 61,000 m² mainly office space (three times that existing), would

result in a massive building barrier to the upper-walkway system and its entry into the Barbican. The architects propose to build over every centimetre of this vast rectangular space. There should be at least a few hundred metres of real open space given over to greenery.

Three Quays House, Lower Thames Street One can forgive a leap in capacity from 12,000 to 22,000 m² since redundant offices would be replaced with flats and hotel. Acceptable design but in view from Tower of London it should not be seen to “pop up” any more than Foster’s Tower Place should have been allowed to “pop up”. Lop off the top storey!

Shield House, 16 New Street Disgracefully empty for 20 years we now have this thoughtful and sensitive refurbishment of a Grade II listed warehouse dating from 1769-71, one of the oldest warehouse survivals in London. Potential City Heritage Award winner.

Sir John Lyon House, High Timber Street One of the best architectural treatments ever for this area. Office content becomes largely residential and a contribution is made to the River Walkway.

34-37 and 38 Bartholomew Close Endorse the addition of No 38 into this scheme for a doctor’s surgery, the original scheme for this warehouse conversion earning our praise.

Faraday Building, Carter Lane Happy for demolition of the ugly “blockhouse” of 1942 and 1962 but building proposed seems alien in the context of this area near St Paul’s, the Choir School and old Deanery. A new Faraday House would be better if it were more in keeping with these and other neighbours. Dislike the monotony of very long (100m) facade along Carter Lane — surely there could be greater sub-division, giving the impression of two or three separate buildings each with its distinct identity in a street where there has always been presumption in favour of traditional and conservation values.

1 Mitre Square etc This proposed 20-storey tower would be “junior partner” to the 50-storey Minerva tower (see above) on the Aldgate roundabout. Office space up from 18,000 to 48,000 m². Would not provide a “more elegant” backdrop to Sir John Cass School, in our view.

4-7 Lombard Lane Good proposal for conversion of redundant offices to residential.

7-10 Old Bailey Handsome stone facade to be dismantled, reworked and reassembled — happy for its internal redevelopment.

Requests for listing

Members will recall that we had asked the Department for Culture, Media and Sport to consider listing New

Change Buildings opposite St Paul’s. After 18 months our proposal was turned down. Similarly the request made jointly by SAVE and ourselves for the listing of two groups of former meat market buildings at West Smithfield was refused. We have long felt that the system by which requests go to this hybrid government department, and are considered by English Heritage inspectors whose advice is then either accepted or rejected by the Department, is cumbersome and unsatisfactory. We have applauded a recent proposal that this task should wholly revert to English Heritage. We are now about to ask for the listing of three post-war livery halls — the Pewterers, Barber-Surgeons and Girdlers.



Highly commended in this year’s Award: St. Ethelburga’s Centre for Reconciliation and Peace

The Society’s history

In 2003 City Heritage was celebrating its thirtieth anniversary and the Committee agreed that the Chairman should write the Society’s history, a project begun in January and completed towards the end of the year. The history will be published early in 2004 with a launch party at the Guildhall Library where it is also proposed we should deposit the Society’s archive material for safe keeping and for the benefit of future research.

The New Architecture Award

In 1991 we became joint presenters with the Worshipful Company of Chartered Architects of the City Heritage New Architecture Award as a positive step towards encouraging higher standards for the City’s new buildings, the impetus for this joint activity coming from Stuart Murphy, the former City Architect, then Master of

the Chartered Architects' livery and, of course, a valued member of City Heritage until his death. The Architects' Company signalled their wish to dissolve the partnership as from 2003, coinciding with our own feeling that such a break was desirable. We wrote to the Master in May: "There will come a day, I am sure, when the Company assessors are likely to select as Award winner a building which we, for one reason or another, dislike and about which we have been strongly critical . . . I am confident that the happy relationship that has existed between our two bodies over the years will continue to flourish."

The City Heritage Award, 2003

The Award for this year's outstanding conservation project went for the refurbishment and conversion of the Grade II* former Public Record Office in Chancery Lane to form the new library and information services centre of King's College London.

The powerfully Gothic "strong box of the Empire" had been built between 1853 and 1895 as a totally fire-proof structure with a series of cellular compartments with thick masonry walls, the floors being brick arches supported on wrought iron beams. There was no lighting or heating. After the Public Record Office had vacated the building its dark and forbidding exterior and difficult interior spaces discouraged any new occupancy until acquired by Kings College as a brilliant solution to their need for library space.

The architects have created a library of 26 linear kilometres of shelving and working spaces to accommodate up to 2,000 students in any one day. The original cells have been opened up by cutting openings between rooms and between rooms and corridors in a transformation which brings light and space. The project was described by the Assessors as of stunning quality, an outstanding contribution to the City scene, a demonstration of how conservation can and should be done.

City Heritage Award 2003: The Maughan Library

Owner: King's College London
 Architect: Gaunt Francis Architects
 Contractor: Wallis

Closely behind and most highly commended came the reconstruction of St Ethelburga's Church in Bishopsgate as a Centre for Reconciliation and Peace.

The medieval church (only 55 ft long) had been almost totally destroyed by an IRA bomb in April 1993. The project to preserve the historic value of the site with its familiar facade, using traditional building techniques and incorporating much of the original material, has been brilliantly achieved: "A miraculous transformation of a unique survival".

Highly commended 2003: St Ethelburga's Church

Owner: The Trustees for St Ethelburga's Church
 Architect: Purcell Miller Tritton
 Contractor: St Blaise Ltd

Events in 2003

February: Annual General Meeting, Salters' Hall
 April: Visit and tour, Chiswick House
 May: Conducted tour of Handel House Museum
 June: Visit and tour: London Symphony Orchestra at St Luke's
 July: Conducted tour: Royal Hospital, Chelsea
 August: Tour of City Heritage Award entries
 October: Visit and tour of Museum in Docklands
 November: The Society's Annual Dinner, Salters' Hall

THE SOCIETY'S EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 2003

C. Douglas Woodward C.B.E.	Chairman
Norman Searle K.L.J., J.P.	Deputy Chairman
Desmond Fitzpatrick	Deputy Chairman
Ann Woodward	Membership and Events Secretary
Barbara Allan	Hon. Secretary
Sidney Morton	Hon. Treasurer
R.T.D. Wilmot	
Anthony Hemy ARIBA	
James Thomas BA Arch, Dip TP, FRIBA	
Anne Thomas BA, MA (Urban Design)	CAAC Representative
Christine MacKenzie Cohen O.B.E., C.C.	

- Congratulations were offered to Mrs Anne Thomas on her election as Chairman of the City's Conservation Area Advisory Committee.
- After eight years as our valued Honorary Secretary, Miss Barbara Allan has resigned for personal reasons and we wish her well.