

# CITY HERITAGE SOCIETY

## ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2004

### *Rejoicing for Temple Bar but misguided planning policies cause concern*

Two events which rang all the right bells with City Heritage were the opening of the new Paternoster Square and the return to the City of Wren's Temple Bar as a gateway into that development. The restoration of Wren's Temple Bar is a conservation triumph, clearly a front-runner in our next City Heritage Award. Our parallel concern for good new architecture is certainly met in Paternoster with its variegated medium-height buildings separated by spacious walkways.

These twin achievements contribute to the quality which makes the City a quite special place. City Heritage has a strong interest in the maintenance of that special quality and that is why we are critical of current planning policies which, in our view, threaten not only the City's architectural attraction but also the economic well-being on which its existence depends.

Our concern as to the City's growing stock of empty office buildings was accentuated in 2004 as such space topped seventeen million square feet. While there were glimmerings of a revival in demand towards the end of the year it is clear that empty or at best under-occupied buildings will be with us for a long time yet. Meanwhile the promotion of still more vast office blocks has continued unabated. Two particular issues were associated with these concerns.

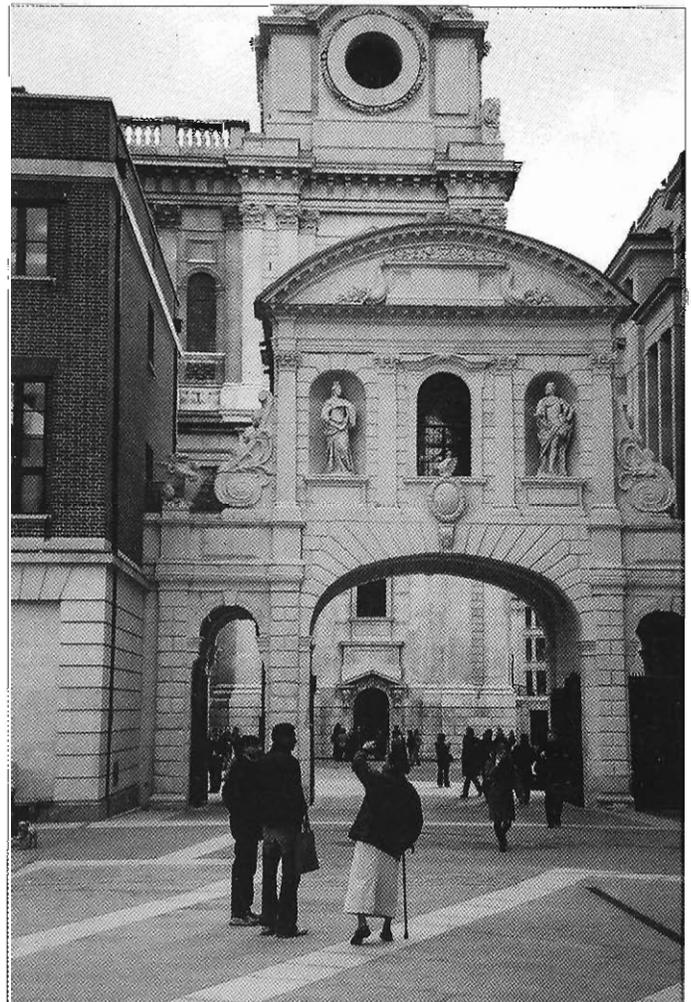
#### **Overcrowded public transport**

Adequate rail and tube provision is essential to the City's working. In July a report from the City Architect to the Planning Committee stated that London's rail network was operating at capacity at peak times. The report also said that the number of people employed in the City was expected to increase from 300,000 to 400,000 over the next few years and that Mr Livingstone was planning for another 58,000 in the "City Fringe".

Pity the poor commuter! The same report said that overcrowded trains were seriously detracting from the City's attractiveness as a place in which to work. It admitted that Crossrail, Thames Link and the East London line extension, which could bring relief, are looking doubtful starters.

In the face of such gloomy prospects and the very real possibility that employers and employed could seek other locations, the City's and Livingstone's response is to encourage the building of more office towers – the architects of which claim as a virtue (!) that where previously three thousand were employed, their tower would accommodate ten thousand!

Is City Heritage alone in feeling that it would be in everyone's interests for the City Corporation to call a halt to any more large building projects, at least until its workforce can travel in reasonable comfort? To deliberately make the City increasingly unattractive as a place in which to do business is surely misguided.



Temple Bar back in the City

## “Planning Gain” is back

In the post-war years “planning gain”, with its notorious bribery and corruption associations fell into disrepute. In the City elected members of the Planning Committee and successive City Architects and Planning Officers rightly regarded the very idea with distaste.

Now planning gain is back in the form of Section 106 Agreements given legal respectability in Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. Section 106 Agreements are much loved by Government, the London Mayor and Local Authorities since they provide windfall finance for such things as street-scene improvements, the money for which would otherwise have to be found from central or local government budgets.

Such agreements arise from development proposals for large buildings of over 10,000m<sup>2</sup>, the developer being asked to make a substantial contribution “to mitigate” the adverse impact that such large developments inevitably have on the locality where they are to be built.

In our view a planning proposal is either acceptable or it is not. If its impact is judged to be adverse it should be rejected – not made subject to a 106 Agreement. As Stephen Crow, a lecturer at York University’s Summer School commented: It looks like buying and selling



Rectory House: Award Winner 2004

planning permissions. City Heritage believes there should at the very least be a modification to this dubious bit of planning law.

## Some planning applications we commended in 2004 ...

### Unilever House

We approve the modest reduction in height that will improve views of St Paul’s, better landscaping and new public areas, particularly the introduction of an art gallery.

### 15-22 Cornhill, 70-77 Lombard Street

The former Lloyds TSB headquarters achieves the right balance between new uses and new building and the historical imperatives of its Grade II\* listed status. The important banking hall space is fully retained, as are the grand staircase and lifts.

### St Bartholomew’s Hospital

Enhanced medical facilities welcomed, the listed buildings all retained, the square itself improved. But disappointment with the proposed elevations on Little Britain and a plea for more general hospital facilities to be provided in one of the retained listed buildings earmarked for office use.

### 131 Aldersgate Street

Commendable change of use from offices to retail or institutional, the agreeable Portland Stone elevations almost wholly retained.

### 7 Lothbury

Highly commendable change of use from long-empty dining club to residential. All the important architectural features of this little City gem retained and earlier undesirable alterations corrected.

## ... And some we greatly disliked

### 133-137 Houndsditch

A building of six storeys completed only 13 years ago to be replaced with one of 16 storeys doubling its capacity from 26,000m<sup>2</sup> to 52,000m<sup>2</sup>. Bulky and massive, higher than its neighbours (which it should not be) St Botolph’s Church is grievously diminished. Another sad development.

### 122 Leadenhall Street

The case for this ugly development is that since it has become the fashion for all tall buildings to win planning approval another one, a bit taller still, must be acceptable. So Foster's Swiss Re (180m) provided the excuse for the Heron Tower (183m), which opened the door for Grimshaw's Minerva (217m). Now Rogers proposes one still higher (224m). A game of leap-frog with half a dozen fashionable architects as the players, Mayor Livingstone egging them on and the Deputy Prime Minister all too keen to confirm his approval should anyone be foolish enough to call for a public enquiry. And so London's skyline is drastically changed and its true landmark buildings – St Paul's, Tower of London, and the Palace of Westminster – degraded. The townscape views supplied by the applicant are horrendous in their impact on views across the City. The existing building houses 1,300 people. The tower would provide space for 5,000!

### Stone House and Staple Hall, Bishopsgate

The worst feature is the replacement of Staple Hall with a 24-storey tower, which would provide a smaller (!) brother to the already approved Heron tower alongside. A much more conservation-oriented approach is called for with this group of interesting buildings, and a strong case for retention of Stone House Court as its centrepiece.

### 25 Snow Hill, 43 Farringdon Street, etc.

We strongly oppose demolition of these buildings at the western end of Smithfield Market and replacement with a single monolithic building on the grounds that they are worthy of restoration. Any development should encompass their conservation.

### Ellerman House, 12-20 Camomile Street

The existing nondescript building of the 1950s is not to be fought for but we dislike the fact that this 22-storey tower would more than double the existing height, the office content going up from 12,000m<sup>2</sup> to 30,000m<sup>2</sup>. We find the applicant's argument that an existing consented scheme is "now too small" to cover the cost of development unconvincing.

### 51 Lime Street

Revised proposal to suit the needs of a prospective tenant who feels that 320,000ft<sup>2</sup> of space is sufficient. But here is a very large site and so, in addition to a tower of 28 storeys for the client, the developer proposes a smaller building of (only) ten storeys for subletting. Our dislike of the earlier scheme remains – the overbearing height of the tower and its dwarfing of the buildings around including St Andrew Undershaft, and the listed buildings in Lime Street and Billiter Street

*Note:* the six developments above all involve Section 106 Agreements "to mitigate" the adverse effects resulting from them.



City Heritage Award: Master Painter-Stainer, Chairman City Heritage, Architect Andrea Cenci, the Lord Mayor.

### **Questions on licensing and gambling**

City planners are far from being free agents these days, constrained as they are by policy dictates from within Guildhall itself and by Government directives such as new licensing legislation with its abolition of fixed closing hours which allows pubs and clubs to operate into the early hours which, we have told the Corporation, would make the City a less pleasant place in which to live or work. We have also deplored the possibilities under this legislation for "sex-related activities" (e.g. striptease and table dancing) which, we have said, should have no place in the City of London.

The Government's other plan, for Las Vegas-style casinos to be built in Britain, will probably not affect the City but as our Chairman suggested at this year's Dinner, some of the City's empty or half-empty office buildings could find themselves being targeted!

### **Listing and livery halls**

Members will recall our proposals to seek the listing of three of the City's post-war livery halls. We had thought that the Companies concerned (Pewterers, Girdlers and Barber Surgeons) would be pleased to have their halls listed. However, the companies were horrified at any such thought which they saw as limiting their freedom to

make even the most modest of changes to their buildings and in view of the cordial relationship we have enjoyed with the livery it was decided not to proceed.

## The Society's history

The Society's history from its inception in 1973 to 2003, completed a year ago was published in February with a launch party in the Guildhall library where, at the same time, we deposited the first boxes of City Heritage archive material. All our papers are now lodged there. In his speech that evening the Chairman said: "It is a comfort to know that in the years to come the records of our transactions, minutes and annual reports, together with a year-by-year account of our City Heritage Awards will be maintained and made available to researchers and others having an interest in the planning history of these past 30 years."

Of the history he said: "It is more than just a record of the Society's doings. Being of the City we have always been a rather special amenity society, impinging as we have done on some of the outstanding planning issues over our 30-year existence."

Copies of the history were given to all members of the Society and it is gratifying to report that sales in City bookshops, particularly the Guildhall library shop, have exceeded expectation.

## The City Heritage Award 2004

The City Heritage Award we run in partnership with the Worshipful Company of Painter-Stainers was made for the transformation of disused office premises at Rectory House, Lawrence Pountney Hill, into what is undoubtedly one of the City's finest residences – a rare example of a 17th century survival, a rectory which became a merchant's house built after the Great Fire.

### Rectory House, 7A Lawrence Pountney Hill

Owner: The Old Rectory (London) Ltd  
Architect: Totus Design Group Ltd  
Contractor: J McGauran-Emmet Building Services Ltd.

Another outstanding refurbishment, highly commended, was 68 King William Street, the former headquarters of Guardian Assurance on the northern approach to the City from London Bridge. Empty for some years it contains a House of Fraser department store behind its impressive classical façade.

### 68 King William Street

Owners: London and Regional Property Ltd  
Architect: ESA Architects and Designers  
Contractor: Galliford Try Construction Ltd

## Events during 2004

*February:* our Annual General Meeting took place in Guildhall and was followed by a reception in Guildhall Library to mark the publication of "Saving the City's Heritage" the Society's history from 1973 to 2003 and the deposit in the library of the Society's archive material.

*May:* An evening visit to Watermen and Lightermen's Hall, the only Georgian livery hall in the City dating from 1778.

*July:* A tour of the buildings entered for the City Heritage Award concluding with a reception at Rectory House, the Award winner.

*August:* Visit to the Red House in Bexleyheath, the house of William Morris, a striking building retaining many of its original features including wall paintings and stained glass by Burne-Jones.

*November:* The City Heritage Dinner was held in the City University Club, Cornhill, with Sir Michael Oliver, that most conservation-minded of Lord Mayors, as our Chief Guest.

Planned visits to the Museum of London's Mortimer Wheeler House in Hackney and to W.S. Gilbert's house in Kensington had to be postponed.

## THE SOCIETY'S EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 2004

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**Norman Searle K.L.J., J.P. Deputy Chairman**

**Desmond Fitzpatrick Deputy Chairman**

**Ann Woodward Membership and Events Secretary**

**Mary Hemy BA Hon. Secretary**

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**Anthony Hemy RIBA**

**Anne Thomas CAAC Representative BA, MA (Urban Design)**

**Christine MacKenzie Cohen O.B.E., C.C.**