



CITY HERITAGE SOCIETY

ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2006

Architectural flights of fancy leave us disappointed

In our report last year we were highly critical of the redevelopment proposed in New Change by St. Paul's for a very large glass construction by French architect Jean Nouvel to replace the elegant sweep of New Change Buildings. Alas, it was approved by the Planning Committee. Our words of objection, as well as those from St. Paul's itself, helped persuade the City Architect at least to require that before final approval was given a sample corner should be built so that members of the Committee could envisage what the end-result would be. Let us hope for wiser second thoughts!

“Walbrook Square” as seen by Nouvel and Foster

This year we have had another Nouvel extravaganza, although on this occasion it is a joint offering with Lord Foster, “Walbrook Square”, an enormous development which would replace Legal and General's nondescript post-war buildings lying between Queen Victoria Street and Cannon Street.

In our comment we admitted that “we should doubtless be crying for the moon to hope for Portland Stone and a traditional style of building, however appropriate they might be for this location” and we accepted that Foster's metal and glass treatment up to seventh storey level offered some interesting elevations although his Queen Victoria Street frontage with its unbroken mass from end to end of the site “would produce one of the most boring vistas in the City”.

These lower levels are what Foster and Nouvel call “the plinths”. They would be topped by Nouvel's “clouds” of multi-faceted glass panels – overbearing, bulky and massive which would tower above and press down on the Mansion House, Royal Exchange and Bank of England. “There is a crudeness to them that certainly does not sit well with any of the surrounding buildings. The architects are trying too hard to be different and ‘unique’ and it does not succeed”. We await the City planners' decision.

“New Court” as seen by Koolhaas

In November we were disappointed with the proposal, this time from a Dutch architect for a building to replace

the Rothschild Bank headquarters at New Court, St. Swithin's Lane.

For some time it has seemed to us that Rothschild's, the sole remaining and most famous of English merchant banks, deserved a better City home even than its existing 1960's buildings – something that would more reflect its 200-year history and international reputation.

The architect, Rem Koolhaas (he has been described as the world's greatest architect!) has said, somewhat defensively, that his design is “the most invisible” thing his practice has done – presumably in recognition of the fact that the site it would occupy is in a very narrow lane, surrounded by traditional buildings, many of them listed, in the middle of the City's most important conservation area. The building would be “discreet, decorous and contemporary”. We cannot see that an eleven-storey edifice in steel and glass dropped into this narrow lane with its low-scale buildings could be discreet or decorous. The planning application contains pictures of Medici palaces and we would like to have seen the new Rothschild bank as more of a palace and rather less “contemporary”.

Will the towers ever happen?

Only two new tower proposals in 2006, (referred to briefly below) and there is evidence that some of the towers already approved may never actually be built, echoing the decision by Minerva to scrap its earlier proposal for its 50-storey tower on Aldgate roundabout in favour of a 14-storey block.

The “Evening Standard” said in September that German fund manager DIFA's plans for its 1007 foot “Helter Skelter” in Bishopsgate was now in question as were the Heron Tower in Bishopsgate, the “Walkie Talkie” on Fenchurch Street and even the “Shard of Glass” at London Bridge. The developers are still looking for funders to buy into half of each scheme. The City property agency, BH2, commented “these buildings are so large many will not be built”.

City Heritage hopes that for the City's continued economic well-being, as well as for the sake of London's skyline, that BH2 are right in their forecast.

Smithfield called in We were pleased that SAVE's efforts (which we had supported) in respect of the General Market Building at Smithfield had resulted in the proposed large development being "called in" for decision by the Secretary of State after a public enquiry.

Enlarged conservation areas We generally welcomed the City Planning Officer's recommendations, approved by the Planning Committee, for new and enlarged conservation areas. The most important of these changes was the inclusion, at long last, of St. Paul's within the existing Ludgate Hill conservation area and renamed St Paul's Churchyard CA; and the inclusion of Liverpool Street within the existing Middlesex Street CA and renamed Bishopsgate CA, something we have also long advocated.

Will so many more work in the City? We commented in July on the City's consultation in respect of its new Local Development Framework, our main concern being to express our disagreement with the forecast of an additional 70,000 jobs being created over the next few years, a forecast which is the main factor behind provision of vast new office space. We expect the workforce to stay around 300,000 with the City's pre-eminence dependent on the quality of its expertise, not on the number of people employed. Should, however, the forecasts prove correct, as many believe, it would place further strain on our already overcrowded transport system.

The "charity children" We expressed our concern to the Corporation at the removal of the Coade stone statues of the two "charity children" from the outside of St.

Botolph's Church Hall, seemingly on police advice that they might be stolen. The Rector was told that an application for listed building consent should have been made. The statues are now displayed in a glass case inside the hall. Replica casts may be installed on the exterior of the hall.

A Royal Message

Modern architecture is all too often restless, uncomfortable and even ugly, and over the years in our Annual Reports and in the Chairman's Statements at our annual meetings we have made reference to our admiration of the Prince of Wales as a most perceptive as well as the most influential commentator on matters architectural. Invariably he has hit exactly the right note.

In May the Editor of the "Estates Gazette", which serves the property industry, wrote a quite impassioned article bemoaning the apparent demise of the conservation lobby, in particular the falling away of English Heritage. In this article he had also quoted the words of our Chairman (regarding the proposal for yet another City tower) which suggested that City Heritage, too, was giving up the fight. One morning, shortly afterwards, there came a message to the Chairman saying that the Prince of Wales had seen the article and urging that City Heritage must never give up.

The occurrence was revealed by the Chairman in his speech at the City Heritage Dinner in November when he said how enormously cheered they had been and that he had promised we should indeed be carrying on.



City Heritage Award ceremony in the choir of St. Paul's.

Left to right: Past-Master Painter-Stainer, the Canon Treasurer, the Lord Mayor, Martin Stancliffe - Surveyor to the Fabric, Douglas Woodward - City Heritage Chairman.

Our comments on some of the planning applications

Mariner House, Pepys Street: An earlier office development we disliked is changed in favour of an hotel which will bring a touch of quality to Pepys Street – but within this big scheme the developers should introduce some open, public space.

1 Tudor Street: A glass box but as glass boxes go this one promises to be reasonably agreeable.

36-38 Leadenhall Street, 1 Rood Lane: At least the existing buildings are being retained – a welcome change from the current propensity to knock everything down and vastly increase the size.

93-95 Gresham Street, 9-12 Basinghall Street: We commend this proposal for redevelopment of two handsome 1920's buildings behind retained or recreated façades. A new lease of life for the two buildings.

16-18 New Bridge Street: Acceptable application to provide more space at the top of this dashing baroque-style Edwardian building.

1-2 Lothbury: Good proposal for redevelopment of this dominant building on the corner with Princes Street behind retained classical elevations. We much dislike the new glazed storey proposed at roof level. There should be improved public space on this corner.

51 Cloth Fair: Applaud change of use from vacant office to residential. Welcome to have another 18th century house reverting to its original use.

21 Great Winchester Street: Handsome bank building of 1915, empty for three years, now to be well developed internally for office use. Our message to the applicants: "Get on with it".

Cutlers Gardens: Mainly internal changes with big increase in retail provision plus new hotel use on upper floors – all acceptable changes.

36 Great St. Helens: We objected strongly to an earlier proposal to stick three storeys on top of this attractive Queen Anne-style house and were pleased the Planning Committee turned it down. We liked this new proposal for change of use from office to residential but this, too, was turned down on the basis that residential use was wrong because of impending major office development around Great St. Helen's. Both cases are the subject of appeals.

40-45 Chancery Lane: Essential that the Tooks Court part of the application, attractive Victorian, is retained with restored façades. New Chancery Lane/Cursitor Street corner should be reduced to one storey because its more aggressive style would over-dominate the handsome Victorian chambers adjoining.

7-10 Old Bailey: Development behind re-worked and restored stone façades would be an improvement on the existing Old Bailey elevation while the rear elevation on to Amen Court would be far better, the ugly fire escape steps removed.

30-32 Lombard Street: One ugly bit of recent architecture replaced by one not much better, but higher and looming aggressively over its more agreeable neighbours.



City Heritage Award: The magnificent interior of St. Paul's after a four-year programme of cleaning and conservation

There were two proposals for office towers which, of course, we opposed while recognising that like all the other tower schemes they too would probably find favour with the Planning Committee.

Of *20 Fenchurch Street* we agree with the applicants who said their tower would not impact adversely on the Tower of London World Heritage Site “because views are already compromised by existing tall buildings”. Too true! We profoundly disagreed with them when they said “The development has regard to the impact on local views and the setting of local historic aspects, particularly views from conservation areas around the site, and impact on listed buildings in the vicinity.” Their own pictures showed all too clearly how empty such claims really are.

The other tower is at *88-90 Bishopsgate* and the only good thing we could find to say of this massive scheme was that it would include a replacement for the Leathersellers livery hall behind a retained bit of façade. We criticised the fact that a replacement public library was to be reduced in size. “Such greed” was our comment.

The City Heritage Award 2006

In its 29th year the City Heritage Award for outstanding excellence in building conservation was presented in July by Lord Mayor David Brewer to the City’s grandest of all buildings, St. Paul’s Cathedral.

The Award, made by our Society in partnership with the Worshipful Company of Painter-Stainers, was made in recognition of the transformation of the interior of the cathedral after a four-year programme of cleaning, conservation, relighting and restoration of the magnificent painted decoration within the great dome and its supporting tambour. The result, said the Assessors, was a truly stunning achievement.

St. Paul’s Cathedral

Owner: The Dean and Chapter of St. Paul’s Cathedral
 Architects: Martin Stancliffe, Purcell Miller Tritton
 Contractor: Nimbus Conservation Ltd.

The Assessors commended two other refurbishment projects: **41 Eastcheap**, a handsome small office development brought back to commercial life behind its fine, retained Victorian façades; and **Condor House**, St. Paul’s Churchyard, a good new office development behind its main retained façade which is an important feature facing the Cathedral.

Events 2006

Members enjoyed six events during the year:

The *Annual General Meeting* in February took place at Pewterers’ Hall.

Visit to *Danson House*, Bexley, a Palladian villa of the 1760’s restored by English Heritage over ten years at a cost of £4 million.

Visit to *Chandos House*, Queen Anne Street, W1, one of Robert Adam’s finest London town houses restored for the Royal Society of Medicine by architects Donald Insall.

Tour of *St. Paul’s Cathedral* to view the magnificent transformation of the interior just after it received the *City Heritage Award*.

Evening tour of *Cutlers’ Hall*, that splendid Victorian building with its distinctive terracotta brick façade in Warwick Lane.

The *Annual City Heritage Dinner* held at the Guildhall Club in November when our guests included the Dean Emeritus of St. Paul’s, the Chairman of the Prince’s Regeneration Trust, the Chief Commoner, the Chairman of the Planning Committee, and Mrs Annie Hampson, the Director of Planning Services at Guildhall.

THE SOCIETY’S EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 2006

C. Douglas Woodward C.B.E.	Chairman
Desmond Fitzpatrick	Deputy Chairman
Norman Searle K.L.J., J.P.	Deputy Chairman
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