

# CITY HERITAGE SOCIETY

## ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2007

### *Will all the new buildings ever be filled?*

The year 2007 has been marked in the City by demolition and redevelopment on a vast scale, Cheapside in particular having the appearance of an enormous building site. In all, one-sixth of the City's floorspace was being developed, mainly for offices.

The construction boom is a response to the City's flourishing financial business – architectural and environmental considerations aside – an undoubted success story which, understandably, has prompted the City Corporation as well as property companies to continue the success story by ensuring there will be ample high-grade office space available when required.

But ..... commentators have been warning of dangers ahead. Anthony Hilton in the Evening Standard feared that by the time the new office blocks had been built financial boom-times would have passed and tenants hard to find. Land Securities, biggest of the property companies, warned that construction levels were unsustainable and Douglas McWilliams, head of the Centre for Economic and Business Research, was forecasting substantial shedding of City jobs.

The City's response is to say that these things go in cycles – down-turn follows boom followed by new advances.

City Heritage has long been of the opinion that over-supply of overlarge office buildings could well result in their being under-occupied – or at worst left empty. In May, commenting on the Corporation's "Core Strategy" proposals for future City development, we questioned the forecasts for employment growth emanating from Mr. Livingstone which visualised an additional 51,000 jobs in the City during the period 2001 to 2016, the City's working population reaching 382,000 by 2016 and almost 400,000 by 2026. It is on such (in our view) dubious figures that the City has encouraged so many large-scale developments, we wrote. We believe that the City's working population will stay at nearer 300,000 –

no bad thing if, as we have also said, the City is the place for headquarters staff while the back-office operations can be sited almost anywhere in these days of increasingly advanced technology.

#### **Threat to the City skyline**

In our Report last year we referred to the massive development proposed for the site between Queen Victoria and Cannon Streets known as "Walbrook Square". Mr. Livingstone's new "Views Management Framework" which changes the rules by which views of St. Paul's have been protected, was approved by the Government and came into force in July. Its first fruits were to enable the City's Planning Committee to approve the Walbrook Square proposal – something which would not have been possible had the rules not been changed in this way.

The City Planning officer said in his report: "It is acknowledged that the higher elements will affect the setting of the Mansion House and other listed buildings but the impact is not considered to be seriously detrimental."!! (Our exclamation marks).

Martin Stancliffe, Surveyor to the Fabric of St. Paul's viewed the matter differently: "We are concerned that the proposed building lies within the strategic viewing corridors . . . It is particularly damaging in the Greenwich View where the tallest 'cloud' (i.e. a 22-storey glass-topped tower) will become the tallest building close to St. Paul's and will form a new edge three dome-widths away from the dome and about as tall as the dome itself."

The 'Sunday Times' in July, describing the implications of the new Livingstone rules, quoted the concerns of both Stancliffe and the City Heritage Chairman. Mira Bar Hillel (Evening Standard) also quoted our dislike of the Walbrook scheme and asked us to help in identifying any forthcoming proposals which similarly spoiled views of the cathedral.

## The “Walkie Talkie” tower approved

One of the City’s worst tower proposals was the so-called “Walkie Talkie” (because of its curious telephone shape) at 20 Fenchurch Street. We commented on it adversely last year in company with English Heritage, UNESCO and other groups. Paddy Pugh, Director of English Heritage’s London Region, described it as London’s ugliest and most oppressive building. After it was approved by the City Planning Committee it was called in for a public inquiry in October by Ruth Kelly, the then Secretary of State.

For CABE (Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment) the Lords Foster and Rogers claimed the tower had “overwhelming support” – goodness only knows on what grounds such a claim could have been made. The public inquiry’s finding, swiftly ratified by new Secretary of State Hazel Blears, was that the tower could be built.

## The Smithfield Inquiry

SAVE Britain’s Heritage have been instrumental in securing a public inquiry into the proposals for a large modern development lying between Farringdon Street, Snow Hill and Smithfield Street which would involve demolition of a number of Victorian buildings (by Sir Horace Jones) at the western end of Smithfield Market. We had earlier provided SAVE with detailed reasons why these neglected buildings should have been listed and one of them subsequently was. The inquiry began in November with a strong case being presented by both SAVE and English Heritage. City Heritage re-affirmed our opposition to the development.

English Heritage staged an exhibition in Smithfield just before the inquiry opened featuring imaginative proposals for a conservation-led regeneration of the area.

The inquiry’s findings will be made known in 2008.

## Comments on other planning applications

We commented on nearly 40 applications during the year. There follows a summary of some of them.

*Bath House, Holborn:* In comparison with the ghastly building opposite at the entrance to Holborn Viaduct Station, the main elevation, while overbearing, is not too bad and we commend the commitment to complete the gatehouse on the north-east corner. What is totally unacceptable is that the development should gobble up the open space south of the existing building.

*Mark Lane, Hart Street:* Planning permission was given in 2005 for this vast site. The new version demands an additional 1,500 m<sup>2</sup> of office space to add to the original 23,000 m<sup>2</sup>. The application is full of the usual nonsense about it “respecting its surroundings and taking into account nearby listed buildings, and local and distant views”. The excuse for its 16-storey height is that it forms part of the “cluster” of tall buildings already seen in relation to the Tower of London World Heritage Site. That is, if there is any damage to views it is the City’s



The “Venetian Gothic” façade of No. 7 Lothbury, winner of the 2007 City Heritage Award (see back page)

fault for having approved earlier tall buildings. The architectural design is really not too bad – it is just too vast.

*19-20 Garlic Hill:* The existing building is not worthy of retention but the replacement offered is singularly lacking in the architectural quality of which this historic street is greatly in need.

*Aldgate Bus Station:* Poor old Aldgate – what it has been waiting for here is a really splendid architectural treatment. The proposed treatment dramatically fails. Its three buildings are described as “jewel-like” but which we find of ascending ugliness, particularly the tallest, 24 storeys, all fully glazed. Such a development would be as alien to Aldgate as to other parts of the City.

*Milton Court:* We objected principally to there being a tower on this site where it is proposed to build additional space for the Guildhall School of Music and Drama – certainly the height of the tower which at 36-storeys would compete with the three carefully-sited existing Barbican towers. The new tower would also protrude in views from the South Bank in the middle of the two western towers of St. Paul’s. Subsequently the proposed tower was reduced by nine storeys. We said it should have been reduced by 24!

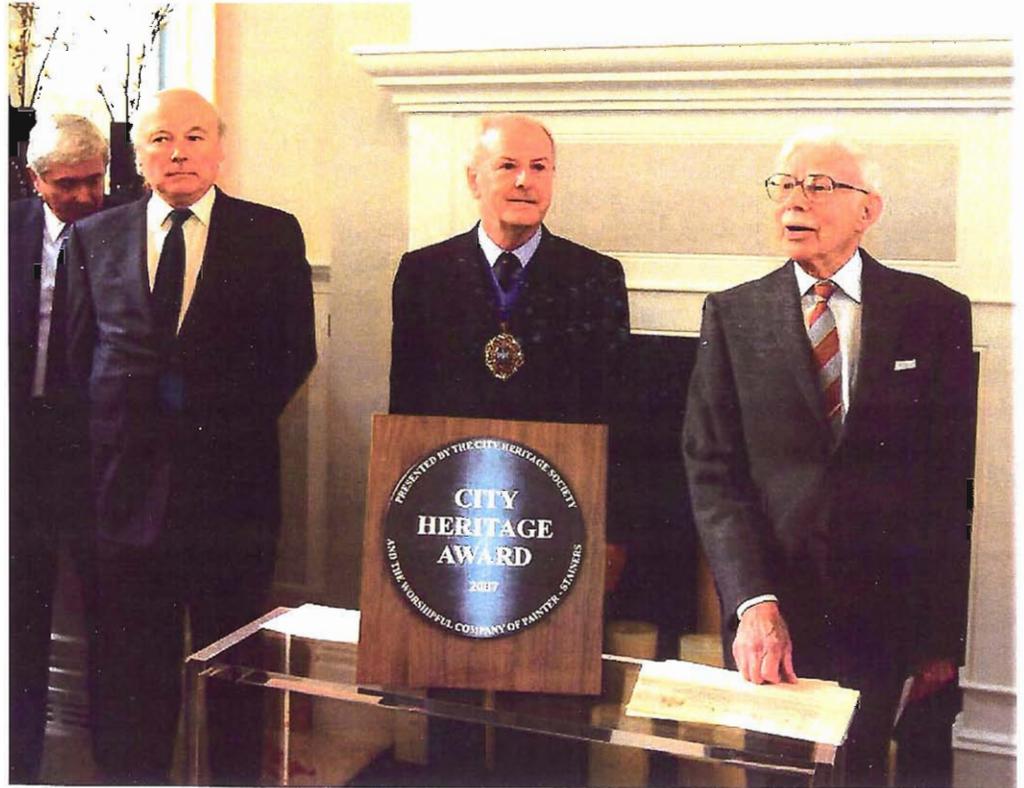
*10-12 Cophall Avenue:* An unusual proposal in that the existing building would be demolished and not replaced – in its stead a landscaped open space. We wondered whether in an unbroken “terrace” it would be right to have this gap. On balance, though, we favoured having a new City garden.

*Telephone Exchange, Moor Lane:* We said that any new building here should have a replacement post office but otherwise considered the building proposed as being reasonably civilized with a possibly interesting façade.

*30 Old Bailey:* Another vast proposal covering some 30,000 square feet with the possibility of a seeming pussy-cat turning into something of a monster judging from the views of this very large building from Fleet Street, Ludgate Circus and particularly from the Central Criminal Court, towering over everything around it . . .

perhaps it is the repetitive chequer-board design of the elevations that makes it look so forbidding.

*Old Billingsgate Market:* We commend change of use from office to events, functions and exhibition space.



The City Heritage Award -  
the Lord Mayor flanked by Marldon directors and City Heritage Chairman

*7-9 Cophall Avenue:* Welcome the plan to convert from unwanted office space to hotel use.

*60-61 Mark Lane:* The City is becoming a new London location for hotels, a development City Heritage has supported if sometimes we wonder whether this vast supply of hotel rooms can be filled. We are pleased that the listed façade of this former office block would be retained but feel a proposed Hart Street extension is a floor too high.

*11-19 Monument Street:* Another very large and unusual proposal for this historic part of the City but one which has much in its favour. A wholly glass southern elevation but with Portland Stone and “slit windows” on its other three sides, the views down Pudding Lane to the Monument enhanced by this stone façade. Incorporated on the eastern side is an area describing the history of the Monument and Fire of London.

*1 Swan Lane:* Seldom can there have been a less convincing argument put forward to justify the towering height of a building next to a rather grand listed one – Fishmongers’ Hall.

*Fleet Bank House, Fleet Street*: We welcome retention of the Fleet Street façade but the proposed development with its other coloured glass elevations is of monolithic scale and at least one storey too high, harming views of Wren's finest steeple, St. Bride's. These views should be retained and the existing Coach and Horses public house and neighbouring Victorian buildings should be incorporated within the proposals.

## City Heritage Award 2007

After the interior transformation of St. Paul's was celebrated in 2006 we wondered whether after such a triumph it might be time to end our Awards. Happily we continued and in the Award's thirtieth year we were able to celebrate a different excellence. Number 7 Lothbury, with its distinctive "Venetian Gothic" front is a building of 1868 once used as offices, then a bank, finally a dining club, but which in recent years had fallen into disuse and disrepair. Seemingly unwanted, it became one of the City's very few buildings to appear on the English Heritage "Buildings at Risk" register. Now transformed as luxury apartments but retaining many of its Victorian features including original wood panelling and filigree metalwork it has achieved a new and worthy existence.

### No. 7 Lothbury

Owner: Tigerwater Ltd  
Architect: Simon Smith  
Contractor: Marldon

Special Commendation was given for the conversion from office use to barristers' chambers of 39-40 Cloth Fair after much remedial work internally and externally. Together with 41-42 Cloth Fair these old houses form a mini-block of architectural merit.

### 39-40 Cloth Fair

Owner: Cloth Fair Trust  
Architect: Totus Design Group  
Contractor: Emmet Building Services Ltd.

## Events 2007

Our *Annual General Meeting* took place in February at Guildhall with drinks in the Guildhall Club bar and the meeting in a West Wing committee room.

In April we had a conducted tour of *Leathersellers' Hall* in its attractive enclave off Bishopsgate, then in May a visit to Chelsea for a tour of *Carlyle's House*, virtually unchanged since the author's day.

In June a visit to a very different house – *Walpole's "little Gothic castle" at Strawberry Hill*, a marvellous survival

from the 1700's. The newly restored church of *St. Mary Aldermary*, with architect Colin Kerr telling us of this splendid piece of conservation was our occasion in August.

The *City's blue commemorative plaques* are a reminder of lost buildings and livery halls, historic figures and events and we had a talk in September by City guide-lecturer Neil Morley updating us on those in place, those being reinstated and proposals for new ones.

Our seventh event of the year was a visit to *No. 7 Lothbury*, winner of the City Heritage Award. We concluded our programme of events with another of our much-enjoyed *City Heritage Dinners* (the 34<sup>th</sup>!) once again in the warm surroundings of the Guildhall Club with former Lord Mayor and Barts consultant surgeon, Sir John Chalstrey, as our chief guest and speaker.

---

**Mrs Christine Cohen**, a long-standing and valued member of City Heritage (together with her late husband John) was elected Chairman of the City's Planning and Transportation Committee in March. We offer her our warm congratulations.

---

## THE SOCIETY'S EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 2007

<b>C. Douglas Woodward C.B.E.</b>	<b>Chairman</b>
<b>Anne Thomas BA, MA (Urban Design)</b>	<b>Deputy Chairman</b>
<b>Desmond Fitzpatrick</b>	<b>Deputy Chairman</b>
<b>Norman Searle K.L.J., J.P.</b>	<b>Deputy Chairman</b>
<b>Ann Woodward</b>	<b>Membership and Events Secretary</b>
<b>Mary Hemy BA</b>	<b>Hon. Secretary</b>
<b>Leslie Breadmore</b>	<b>Hon. Treasurer</b>
<b>James Thomas BA Arch, Dip TP, FRIBA</b>	
<b>Anthony Hemy, RIBA</b>	