

City Heritage Society

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE FOR 1987

From Big Bang to stock market collapse

As we forecast a year ago, the past twelve months was notable for an enormous surge in the number and size of planning applications approved in the City. After several years of reasonably controlled development the lid was lifted with a vengeance in 1987 as the City sought to demonstrate that in the confines of the square mile there was still abundant scope for many more large buildings. In fact, over the past two years the City has approved some 15 000 000 sq. ft. of office development.

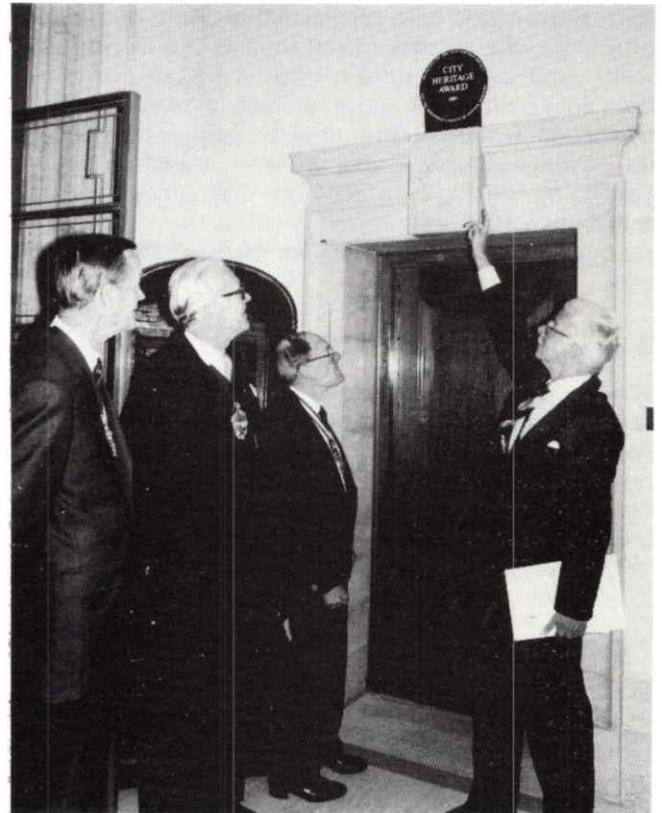
Towards the end of the year the collapse of the Stock Market heralded a return to a more normal climate. We welcomed the Chairman of the Planning Committee's statement in October that the boom in City office development may have come to an end and that the City's main concern now was to ensure that it was not awash with unwanted office space in the early 1990's. He went on to say that the main concern was excessive size and bulk and that from then on any scheme exceeding the plot ratio limit of 5:1 would have to be exceptional to get through. The emphasis in the future would be the encouragement of better design.

Welcome words but alas in a number of cases already too late. As our Chairman said at this year's City Heritage Society Dinner, while we will not be shedding too many tears at the demolition of some of the 1950's and 1960's buildings now in hand, we are very concerned that in place of each middling-sized or large building that is being demolished we are getting massive buildings as replacements.

That many wrong decisions have already been irrevocably taken was evidenced by the demolition of Lee House (no loss) and its replacement by an enormous building at least twice as large, and similar overlarge developments agreed at other parts in the City. In fact the first proposals for the Lee House replacement were even more formidable and were rejected after a spirited debate in the Court of Common Council. Further gigantism has been agreed for the Moor House replacement at the Moorfields end of London Wall, and for the 'City Plaza' scheme near St. Alphage. The extraordinarily insensitive proposals for 'Number 1 London Wall' at the Museum of London end will, we hope, in today's improved climate, be given short shrift by the Planning Committee.

City of London Local Plan

A public enquiry took place in May into the revised Local Plan for the City. Our submission stated that in the short time that the plan had in effect been operative our worst fears had already been realized. While the plan has many good features we now believe that the vagueness of its policies and the



City Heritage Award 1987 goes to Clothworkers Hall. Picture shows, left to right: the Master Clothworker, the Lord Mayor Sir David Rowe-Ham, the Master Painter-Stainer and CHS Chairman Douglas Woodward.

breadth of interpretation that can be – and is already being – placed upon them, make the plan without value in many important environmental issues.

As evidence for this view we noted the way in which planning consents were being given to buildings far in excess of the already generous 5:1 plot ratio allowed by the plan (e.g. former Post Office building, St. Martin-le-Grand and the Lee House development referred to above), and how the plan evidently did not preclude inappropriate developments such as the James Sterling building on the Mappin and Webb site (see below).

CHS was represented at the enquiry by Mr. A. Hemy, a member of the Executive Committee.

We also submitted observations, in December, on the City of London Smithfield Local Plan.

The Poultry saga continues

In June the Planning Committee by a narrow majority rejected the Palumbo proposal to demolish all the buildings in the Poultry/Queen Victoria Street triangle, including Mappin and Webb's and to erect a single wedge-shaped building to provide 135 000 sq. ft. of open office space. But a far more positive rejection for the scheme was to follow in July when the Court of Common Council voted overwhelmingly against the Palumbo proposals.

We think it most regrettable that in spite of this further conclusive rebuff Mr. Palumbo is still pursuing what can only be described as a one-man obsession to rebuild the City at this sensitive point. Still refusing to accept the decision of so many he has again seen fit to appeal against the City Corporation's decision and so the buildings on this site, buildings which for more than a century have epitomized the City's heart, are allowed to become increasingly run-down, a deplorable waste of prime building space.

New buildings give pleasure

On a brighter and more hopeful note the Committee has noted with pleasure that some of the new buildings which came out of their wraps during 1987 were clearly giving pleasure to us and to our members in general. We have in fact invited members to tell us which recent new buildings have given them most pleasure and we are in the course of compiling a list (albeit not a very long one) of such buildings which may form the basis for a scheme to recognize agreeable buildings of this kind in some way.

Bracken House

We are pleased that following representations by a number of conservation bodies, which we ourselves supported, Bracken House, Cannon Street, the headquarters of the Financial Times, became the first post-war building to be listed as of special architectural interest. Bracken House was designed in the late 1950's by Sir Albert Richardson.

Paternoster Square

During the year there has been considerable interest in the plans by a property consortium led by Stuart Lipton's Mountleigh Group to redevelop the unlovely Paternoster Square by St. Paul's. The Chairman of CHS, invited to comment by the City Recorder in March, said he was disappointed by the choice of architects and that he would have preferred to have seen architects who were more in tune with a feeling for the City. Subsequently we have had an exchange of letters and the developers have undertaken to consult CHS before decisions are finally taken.

A significant contribution to the debate were the comments on the Paternoster redevelopment by the Prince of Wales speaking at the annual dinner of the City's Planning Committee in December. He used the occasion to lambast modern architecture and to accuse property developers and their architects of having been more destructive of British cities than the Luftwaffe in the last war.

Other planning matters

During 1987 we commented on a record number of more than 60 planning applications. The Committee would especially like to express their thanks to Mr. Graham Elliott for his valuable contribution to the work. We list our comments on some of the applications below.

80-84 Leadenhall Street Proposed building quite out of scale...no attempt to relate the new development to the existing. Recommend refusal.

136-140 Bishopsgate Existing building is seemly and should be considered for retention. If replaced, elevations must be much better than the unimaginative ideas shown.



One of the splendidly restored rooms at Clothworkers Hall, winner of the 1987 City Heritage Award.

7 Pilgrim Street At least the lower part of the building should be retained. Proposed building is one floor too high.

Winchester House While not regretting the loss of the existing building the proposed replacement is for a lumpy, unlovely tower nearly as tall and twice as bulky as the Natwest Tower. A ghastly proposal to which we strongly object (later rejected by Planning Committee).

21-26 Garlick Hill Quite the most individual of the few remaining warehouse buildings in the City. CHS believes there is every reason for retention of facades. Proposal to rebuild as a copy would produce a feeble imitation of the present robust Victorian elevation (rejected by Planning Committee).

18-20 Bride Lane CHS unhappy about replacement of three small buildings with a single undistinguished block. New buildings out of scale. Existing three buildings should be retained.

12-15 Finsbury Circus Proposed elevations out of scale and generally unsatisfactory.

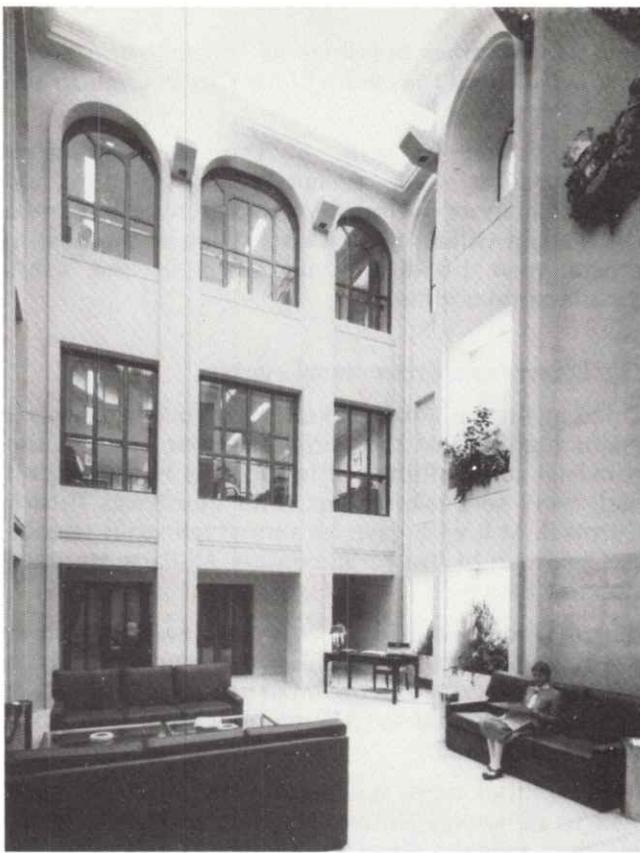
48 Upper Thames Street CHS likes the scheme which is more appropriate to this part of the City than some of its neighbours.

6-8 Eastcheap CHS would regret loss of existing building. New design not good enough for such a prominent position.

10 Snow Hill New building too big, completely dwarfing neighbouring 36/37 Cock Lane. Proposed elevations an odd mixture.

8 St. Andrewes Hill An attempt at good architectural manners but detailing coarse and unlovely.

52-63 London Wall, 20-56 Copthall Avenue The proposed unified elevation along Copthall Avenue would result in loss of present sequence of narrow frontage buildings making nonsense of conservation area designation. Hope at least the Champneys building is saved.



An interior view of Banque Paribas, the specially-commended entry in the 1987 City Heritage Award.

124-126 Chancery Lane CHS would much regret the loss of integrity of the separate buildings. We would wish to see the clear retention of three separately identifiable buildings.

21-25 Old Bailey An uninspired piece of work. This design might just be acceptable elsewhere but in a conservation area and opposite the Central Criminal Court it simply is not good enough.

2-12 Hosier Lane Design lacks conviction; needs to be simplified to achieve the modest architectural expression appropriate to the location.

'City Plaza', London Wall Phase 1 could be interesting addition to London Wall scene but CHS objects to the bulk of the buildings envisaged and the creation of a great wall cutting off Barbican from rest of the City. Concern also as to substantial addition to working population in this small area.

76-78 Leadenhall Street Crude in style and unduly complicated for such a narrow frontage.

25-33 Ludgate Hill This large development should not be taking place in a conservation area but CHS reasonably satisfied with treatment now proposed.

Skinners Hall/Cloak Lane We much prefer this scheme to the previous one. The new work is in a satisfactory Georgian style. The simplicity and lightness of the new elevations to 9 Cloak Lane would be just right next to the robust detailing of the older work.

120 Fleet Street (Daily Express) The front 27 metres are retained. The replacement elevations at the rear are unattractive and lacking any architectural distinction. There must be a radical improvement before this application can be taken seriously.

15-17 Eldon Place The juxtaposition of three gabled bays next to a classical facade is an architectural solecism. A sensitive architect would have appreciated the need for modesty and used a single unassertive design.

90-96 Cannon Street An unattractive design with extraordinary disparity in the scale of the various elements. In Bush Lane there is a total disregard of the existing buildings.

Golden Lane House Commend retention of the existing front but surely the developers could do better than their awful proposal for the rear elevations...insensitive, overblown and over-scale. (This application was later approved).

Barbican Station Competent, modest design, much more successful than some of the more flamboyant attempts which attempt too much and thereby fail.

47-57 Gresham St/22-26 Wood St Just one more example of the gigantism which is disfiguring the City. Something better is essential on this important corner site.

6-9 Middle St. Too many disparate elements in these relatively short street frontages. Instead of harmonious diversity there is a jumble of badly related elements.

1 London Wall (November) CHS considers this probably the worst of the London Wall planning applications submitted to date ... we are increasingly opposed to applications of this kind for enormous developments which seek to occupy every inch of the available space and which pay no heed to the environmental damage they would cause to others in the vicinity.

30-40 Eastcheap Intention is for a full-blooded copy of a Victorian revival office somewhat in the style of Francis I...genuine attempt to fit into a conservation area.

80-84 Leadenhall St. No attempt made to relate this development to the existing. Elevations particularly incongruous.

Conservation Area Advisory Committee

We are represented on CAAC by the Vice-Chairman, Mr. Norman Searle. The Committee makes an extremely valuable input into the planning process and is frequently instrumental in encouraging the Planning Committee to take a modified stance in respect of planning applications in conservation areas.

The 1987 City Heritage Award

The City Heritage Award which we present jointly each year with the Worshipful Company of Painter-Stainers for the best example of building conservation was given in 1987 for the refurbishment of Clothworkers Hall, Dunster Court. It was the first occasion that a livery hall had received the conservation accolade for work described enthusiastically by the assessors as 'sumptuous', 'breathtaking' and 'a revelation'.

The hall had been rebuilt in the 1950's but because of limited funds and shortage of materials at that time the interior decoration and furnishings had been austere. Now the neo-Gothic character of the hall has been suitably developed and enriched and at the same time modern services have been built into the design. One assessor described the work as 'creative conservation' sensitively handled and demonstrating that English craftsmanship was very much alive.

We congratulate the Worshipful Company of Clothworkers as owners; Donald W. Insall and Associates, the architects; and Higgs and Hill Management Contracting Ltd., as main contractors.

Specially commended by the assessors this year was the refurbishment and renewal of the Banque Parisbas, 68 Lombard Street, where the original 1930 banking hall has been totally redesigned behind its retained facade, achieving an increase of 70 per cent in usable space.

Our congratulations to Banque Parisbas, owners; Whinney Mackey-Lewis Partnership, architects; and Higgs and Hill Ltd., contractors.

The Assessors in 1987 were:

Ashley Barker (Head of London Division, English Heritage)

Jenny Freeman (London Advisory Committee, English Heritage)

S. J. Murphy (Cities of London and Westminster Society of Architects)

Matthew Saunders (Ancient Monuments Society)

Charles Knevit (Architectural Correspondent, 'The Times')

R. C. Houghton and A. F. Shannon (Worshipful Company of Painter-Stainers)

C. Douglas Woodward (City Heritage Society)

The Clifford-Turner Lecture

This year's lecture was given by Mr. Ashley Barker who is head of the London Division of English Heritage – and one of the assessors since its inception of our City Heritage Award.

In a sparkling discourse he took as his theme Christopher Wren's statement that 'Architecture has its political use, public buildings being the ornament of the country'. Buildings such as St. Paul's Cathedral

and the Victorian buildings in Throgmorton Street told people that they were in the City of London and nowhere else.

He said that in spite of the many unhappy developments over recent years he now felt somewhat more optimistic in that architects seemed once again willing to draw on styles of the past to create new buildings that were in the City's architectural tradition.

The Dinner and other social events

Once again the annual Dinner in November was a major highlight of the social calendar. Held in the convivial surroundings of Innholders Hall we again had every seat taken. Our chief guest was Patrick Cormack M.P. who gave us a most felicitous speech as Chairman of the Parliamentary All-Party Heritage Committee.

In April members had an enjoyable evening visit to the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich, which has been described as the most beautiful museum in Britain. Our thanks to CHS member Peter Duggan of the museum staff.

In September there was another enjoyable evening visit to Kenwood House, Hampstead Heath, home of the Iveagh Bequest pictures, followed by refreshments at the Magpie and Stump opposite the Old Bailey.

CHS Tie At long last, and thanks to the Vice-Chairman's efforts, we now have a splendid CHS tie in grey and red incorporating, of course, our celebrated lamp-post.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE FOR 1987

C. Douglas Woodward CC	Chairman
Norman Searle	Vice-Chairman and representative on Conservation Area Advisory Committee
Gordon Rees	Hon. Treasurer
Mrs. Valerie Meixner	Hon. Secretary
Mrs. Ann Woodward	Membership Secretary and Social Events
Graham Elliott	Adviser on Planning Applications
Charles Croot	Publicity
Anthony C. Hemy, Dip Arch. RIBA	
R.T.D. Wilmot CC	
G.M.E. Williams CC	
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Mrs Kay Goodwin	Hon. Secretary, City Heritage Award