



CITY HERITAGE SOCIETY

ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1996

The major concern for the Society in 1996 came late in the year, involving a proposed replacement for the Baltic Exchange building which had been badly damaged in the terrorist bomb explosion of 1992.

In our Annual Report a year ago we had voiced our concern at the way in which the bomb-damaged building had suffered further deterioration following a clear commitment that the Exchange was to be restored. The Society demanded that this listed building, in particular the portico and exchange floor should be rebuilt as they were, using as much as possible of the original materials, with additional rebuilding in replica.

English Heritage, as custodian of the remains, had made it clear that such restoration was possible and desirable and a first proposed replacement building on the site, which respected the commitment for restoration, was in fact given planning permission.

Then, from the same developers, came word of an entirely new proposal for the so-called 'millennium tower', a building of 92 storeys rising to over 1200 feet, double the height of the far too high National Westminster tower block, dwarfing everything around it.

City Heritage was among the first bodies to protest. In the light of premature press comment giving the impression that approval by the City Corporation was something of a foregone conclusion, the Chairman, in a letter to *The Times* in September wrote:

'It is difficult to find a single good point in favour of Trafalgar House's millennium tower other than that it would probably fit well into the street patterns of New York or Hong Kong. For the City of London it is an absurdity a 1200 ft transparent skyscraper would be totally counter to the whole character of the City of London which, in spite of the building disasters inflicted upon it in recent years, is still a place of narrow streets and lanes and buildings of modest scale.'

When the planning application was actually lodged the Society informed the City Corporation that it strongly opposed the proposal for demolition of the remains of the Baltic Exchange, upgraded in 1989 to Grade II*:

'Since the damage to the building City Heritage has consistently maintained that restoration of the facade and hall was an essential requirement in any redevelopment we see no reason whatsoever for not making use of the substantial remains.'

'City Heritage is convinced that a sensitive scheme involving the creative re-use of the listed exchange hall would enhance

A tower of this height and bulk would totally dominate the London skyline

the City's standing internationally careless destruction of a City treasure would result in opprobrium'.

Of the proposed tower we advanced a long catalogue of reasons for rejection, the overriding one being that a tower of this height and bulk would totally dominate the London skyline and still further reduce the importance, impact and scale of St. Paul's and other buildings that create the character of the City of London.

We warned also of wind tunnel effect, loss of light, the risk of aircraft disaster, likelihood of traffic problems from such over-development, the undesirability of so much office space being in the hands of a single developer, and the deleterious effect on the setting of surrounding conservation areas.

We took the opportunity to point out to the Corporation the folly of encouraging ever higher buildings in the City. 'The rapid increase in the height of the highest building and the total number of high buildings is horrifying from the conservation point of view In 1962 only two London buildings were higher than St. Paul's (366 feet), neither of them in the City. By 1978 there were five in the City (the Barbican towers - 412 ft; Britannic House - 395 ft and Commercial Union - 394 ft). Then the stakes were dramatically increased by the Nat West tower - 638 ft - in 1979.

'When the dam had burst in the 1970's it was not long before someone pressed for and obtained permission to go over 600 ft. So it will be again, if permission is given for Foster's building, other mega buildings will be proposed.

'As late as 1962 St. Paul's still reigned supreme in the City as it had done for 300 years. In 30 years, 300 years of sustained beauty was damaged. There is now an opportunity for the City to say no to a building of this insolent height'.

Subsequently there has been public outcry against the tower.

English Heritage has, late in the day, come out unequivocally against it — and, indeed, against the tower disease in general. There has been condemnation, too, from the London Planning Advisory Committee and from the London Chamber of Commerce who said: 'With three million square feet of offices still standing empty in the City, there is concern that the new tower would, if built, simply attract occupiers from neighbouring buildings, increasing the vacancy rate even further.'

It would seem now to be impossible for the Corporation to grant planning permission for a proposal so manifestly unsuitable and so universally disliked. If it should do so, City Heritage would be in the forefront of those opposing the scheme at the Public Inquiry that would inevitably follow.

Meanwhile the tower mania continued into 1997 with proposals for a 70 per cent increase in height of a revamped Britannic House in Moor Lane, another project which City Heritage will wholeheartedly oppose.

Other planning applications

During 1996 the Society commented on 23 other planning applications as follows:

23-45 Fann Street A welcome addition to the City's housing stock.

11-13 Holborn Viaduct While the style of the building is not particularly happy for Holborn Viaduct, not sitting well with its neighbours, it will be in tune with the newer buildings to the rear in Fleet Place.

35-37 Cock Lane The existing Victorian buildings would have been worth refurbishment but at least the new design is close to providing a replica facade.

13-15 Fenchurch Avenue The existing 1960's building of no great merit and the proposed neo-classical design provides some visual improvement.

King Edward Building and 102-105 Newgate Street We note with approval the retention of the King Edward Building and the proposals for the redevelopment of the sorting office buildings behind the churchyard of Christchurch.

25 Cannon Street We wonder whether there is a good case for demolition of one of the few good examples of post-war building — although the replacement proposed is also a good design.

17-19 Monument Street The proposed building, a sort of Italian Renaissance, is something of a stylistic joke but will be in pleasant contrast to the bland office blocks surrounding it.

1 Harrow Place Welcome for proposed addition to housing stock.

Rectory at St. Bartholomew the Great Considerable misgivings about size of proposed house near the church. Surely the existing 'watch-house' is perfectly adequate as a rectory.

31-45 Gresham Street Replacement of a dull 1960's building with a slightly less dull one — but at least having a more elegant skyline solution.

78 Cannon Street Some improvement on the glass and metal slab of the existing building but great lack of information as to materials, elevations.

Site south of Pilgrim Street Ingenious and a welcome relief from the high-tech designs nearby. Pleased at way the scheme relates to its neighbours including Apothecaries Hall.

140 Minories Renewal of planning permission for a good six-storey office building opposite the Tower, replacing a very unattractive 1960's building.

10-15 Lombard Street Existing buildings monumental C.1930 of no great quality but consistent with neighbours in crucial City centre. Proposed replacement is 1990's counterpart, no improvement visually but providing better internal accommodation.

97-99 Gresham Street Modified scheme: Less of existing stonework can be used — pity but understandable.

Muscovy Street site We urge that permission to demolish buildings is withheld until a replacement scheme is submitted and approved.

4 Bouverie Street This pleasant Victorian building should be retained for use as shop/restaurant with flats above.

15 Trinity Square Welcome proposals for retention and conversion as restaurant and flats.

7-9 Bride Street Commend this conversion of an attractive Victorian building for use as flats and restaurant.

Ludgate House Welcome retention of Victorian building on corner of site. Proposed extension along St. Bride Street not acceptable - rebuilding in replica preferred; 5 St. Bride Street, part of interesting Victorian terrace, should be retained.

120-129 Fleet Street Bold and competent scheme for restoration of Daily Express building and demolition of adjoining Aitken House — no loss. Should be a public way through.

31-34 St. Andrews Hill Welcome for creative re-use of Victorian buildings.

36-43 Poultry Demolition should not be allowed until plans for rebuilding are submitted and approved. Any redevelopment should address the grotty car park and exposed end wall of adjoining building.

The empty buildings

The Society has continued to address itself to the City's major problem — the existence of so many empty office buildings, a problem which we believe has been exacerbated by the City Corporation's planning policies. The positive encouragement given to developers to create vast new office buildings for which there is demonstrably only the most limited demand at the expense of what remains of the historic city is not the policy in our view to achieve maximum take-up of the City's buildings. A major reason for businesses to locate in the City has to be its distinctive character.

Paternoster is the greatest of the City's planning failures. The owners of this very large site were allowed to close down every one of the businesses there and leave it for years as a derelict eyesore at the very point, next to St. Paul's Cathedral, which is most frequented by visitors to the City from home and abroad.

The cost of a comprehensive development for such a large area is now so forbidding that developers seem unable to

embark on the task. This was certainly the impression given at a meeting called by the City Architecture Forum in April where developers were suggesting that the only hope was for the City Corporation itself to buy the site and build on it.

Such a move is improbable to the point of fantasy. Your Chairman, addressing the meeting, said there was no reason why the site should not be redeveloped piecemeal with mixed uses and that given such an approach, work 'could start tomorrow'.

Greater diversity the answer

The Society has for many years been pressing for a substantial increase in the amount of residential accommodation in the City and the year 1996 was notable as being a watershed in this respect with a welcome number of planning applications for change of use to residential from offices and for new residential buildings, as well as a number of completed projects notably that at Little Britain.

It has long seemed to us that one important solution to the problem of empty buildings in the City is to promote uses additional to offices. While the City's chief strength will always lie in its banks, financial markets and insurance offices, its success for the future requires additional strings to its bow: shipping interests, the meat trade (at Smithfield), medical uses (based on the fame of Barts Hospital), educational, media interests (it was a tragedy to lose the newspaper industry but PR, advertising and marketing should find a natural home in the City, legal — to name some obvious uses.

Residential including hotels fit well into a more diverse City of this kind, as of course does retailing, which we have also long championed.

The City's magnificent churches are an important ingredient in a fully-rounded City and we are delighted that efforts to ensure the healthy continuity of the churches appear to have been successful with earlier warnings of closure for some now having receded. The churches need more visitors however and on our suggestion the Southwark Heritage Association undertook production of an illustrated guide to all the City churches, which was recently published, with the Society as one of its sponsors.

The Award

For only the third time in its 19 years' history, the City Heritage Award for 1996 went to two recipients.

The first was to Royal Insurance for the refurbishment of their 'banking hall' interior at 1 Cornhill. The banking hall, dating from 1905, because of pressure on space had been used as office accommodation with a maze of desks, its balcony filled with filing cabinets. Now the hall has been restored to its former glory, providing in addition to its use as a head office reception area, a state-of-the-art presentation room.

Architect: A.F. Saul, Saul-Jarrett Partnership
Contractor: D. Hammond Contracts Ltd.

The second recipient was the Bishopsgate Foundation for their restoration at 14 Brushfield Street of a town house of the 1790's, which for many years had been derelict. It is now brought back to life for use as meeting room and teaching accommodation for the adjoining Bishopsgate Institute.

Architect: Charles Shepherd, Lloyd Leroy Architects
Contractor: Walter Lilly & Co. Ltd.

The award for Brushfield Street, left to right: Master Painter-Stainers, Chairman Bishopsgate Foundation, the Lord Mayor, Chairman of the City Heritage Society



Gaps in listing

The Society is indebted to Deputy-Chairman Desmond Fitzpatrick for work he is doing on behalf of the Executive Committee in identifying gaps which exist in the number of listed buildings in the City.

His first such 'list' relates to the Cornhill area and has been submitted to the Corporation for attention. Others will hopefully follow.

Events

The Society's Dinner for 1996 took place in March and was a most enjoyable occasion at Benjy's Restaurant in Lime Street (alas now closed).

In May we had one of our well supported walks — this time around the City's lanes and alleyways — and a visit to the St. John's tower in Clerkenwell.

In July members enjoyed a visit to the House of St. Barnabas-in-Soho with a splendid guide in Dr. David Avery. The August event was a guided tour of St. Giles Church, Cripplegate, conducted by the admirable Frank Major.

In October we had another excellent walk, this time around the Temple, with Desmond Fitzpatrick imparting a vast number of facts about the buildings there and the historic and literary connections.

Celebrating the City Heritage Award in the refurbished splendour of No. 1 Cornhill



The City Heritage Lecture 1996 was given by Geoff Marsh with the intriguing title 'City of London — beyond the office ghetto' whose theme was that the successful future of the City rests on more than office blocks.

In July the Chairman was invited to be the guest of honour at the Triennial Awards ceremony of the Worshipful Company of Tylers and Bricklayers when he congratulated the Company and the award winners for their important contribution to the building heritage.

The Executive Committee 1996/97

| | |
|-------------------------|------------------------------------|
| C. Douglas Woodward CBE | Chairman |
| Norman Searle | Deputy Chairman |
| Desmond Fitzpatrick | Deputy Chairman |
| Gordon Rees | Hon. Treasurer |
| Ann Woodward | Membership Secretary |
| Stella Currie | Social Events |
| R. T.D. Wilmot | |
| Anthony Hemy | |
| James Thomas | |
| David Tettmar | Hon. Secretary (up to Sept. 1996) |
| Barbara Allan | Hon. Secretary (co-opted Oct 1996) |
| Planning Applications | Anthony Noakes |
| | James Thomas |
| | Desmond Fitzpatrick |

Conservation Area Advisory Committee:
Messrs. Fitzpatrick, Searle and Thomas are members of CAAC and provide a valuable link with CHS

CITY HERITAGE AWARD 1996: The Assessors

| |
|--|
| Ashley Barker OBE FSA FRIBA AADipl |
| Mrs. Jennifer Freeman BA DipCons(AA), London Advisory Committee of the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England |
| R.C. Houghton Dip Arch RIBA, Worshipful Company of Painter-Stainers |
| P.Wynne Rees BSc B Arch BTP RIBA MRTPI, City Planning Officer, Corporation of London |
| Mathew Saunders BA Cantab, Ancient Monuments Society |
| A.F. Shannon ARIBA AA Dip, Worshipful Company of Painter-Stainers |
| C. Douglas Woodward CBE, Chairman, City Heritage Society |