



CITY HERITAGE SOCIETY

ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1997

Into our twentyfifth year

In 1998 the Society celebrates its Silver Jubilee, having come into being (albeit with a different name) in April 1973.

The motivation for creating the "Barbican Conservation Group" as it was first called was the establishment by the City Corporation of the Conservation Area Advisory Committee and the perceived need to inject into that committee an informed residents' viewpoint on how the City should develop.

Of course, by 1973, much of value in the City's built heritage had already been destroyed or was under notice of destruction in the decades of frenzied post-war development. But it seemed to Douglas Woodward and Anthony Henfrey, both Barbican residents and the former a recently elected Common Councilman, that much could still be done to safeguard the City from the worst effects of further unhappy development.

The City Heritage Society was soon adopted as a more accurate name for a body which, while it still has a bedrock of City residents as members, came to represent the views, concerns and commitment of people living far beyond the Square Mile — many of whom worked in the City.

The Society was registered with the Civic Trust as the City's conservation and amenity group and gained early recognition among the City Corporation's planning officers and elected members as a body whose views could be taken seriously as exemplified in our regular comments on all major planning applications and our major input into the drafting of the City's Unitary Development Plan. Membership, both individual and corporate, was built up and maintained with a strong programme of social and educational events organized so well over the years by Ann Woodward.

The City Heritage Awards Scheme for notable conservation projects were launched in 1978 in partnership with the Worshipful Company of Painter-Stainers. More recently the Society joined with the Worshipful Company of Chartered Architects in presenting awards to encourage high standards in new architecture (though, alas, there have been all too few buildings to merit such recognition).

Looking at the City's streets and buildings in 1998 it is not easy to assess the effect which the Society's contribution has had. Our 20-year-old battle to save the Mappin and Webb site ended ultimately in failure but this was because of central Government lapses, not any lack of support in the City itself. There have been other disappointments but the Society can, with some justification, say that were it not for us the City would be a far worse place than it is.

The "millennium tower" killed off

Our strongly-voiced opposition to the proposal for the proposed 92-storey "millennium tower" on the site of the former Baltic Exchange helped to kill off that absurd proposal which wasted hundreds of man-hours of work in the Corporation's planning department.

On a lesser scale, the proposal to add substantially to the height of Britannic Tower, Moorfields with a "spire" on its top was withdrawn.

We hope that these will be the last proposals for new towers in the City and that the study under way for the London Planning Advisory Committee, the City Corporation and other London bodies will be positive in coming out against further high building.

During 1997 the pace of building development in the City continued at a very high level with some enormous schemes under way. If "skyscrapers" are out, "groundscrapers" are certainly in. The Society, while recognizing the economic pressures for buildings which provide very large dealing floors, has consistently argued against over-concentration on such buildings which we believe to be alien to the City's architectural character and which, in the longer-term, are likely to become redundant.

On the credit side, some of the buildings which have recently emerged from their wraps are positive improvements on the post-war buildings they replace.

Paternoster - hope at last!

The outstanding building proposal that emerged in 1997 (for decision in 1998) was the masterplan for Paternoster produced by Sir William Whitfield. At last there is hope

for work to begin on this long-derelict eyesore adjoining St. Paul's.

While the Society has some reservations about the scheme we are generally strongly in favour of the proposal which involves six separate projects around a central square, allowing for the kind of "piecemeal" development of the site which we have long argued is the only possible practical approach to its hoped for completion.

Colonnaded shopping arcades are a welcome attraction of the proposed central square in Paternoster, a feature which one of our Committee members, Tom Wilmot, has long been advocating as a desirable element for many of the new building developments in the City. We find it hard to understand why architects, developers (and our City planners) seem to be resistant to this idea which from the City users' point of view would be highly commendable. It is argued that such arcades are alien to the City of London — but with so many other changes to the built environment this seems a not very convincing argument.

Development Plan under review

The City's Unitary Development Plan, into which the Society made a significant input during the years of its preparation, was adopted in 1994. A review was begun in 1997 and the Society is taking the opportunity of submitting comments and suggestions as to how the Plan could be strengthened in a number of ways to help protect the City's future development.

We are indebted to our Deputy chairman, Desmond Fitzpatrick, for his research into seeming omissions to the Statutory List of Historic Buildings and we have passed his suggestion to the Corporation for attention.

Towards diversification of building uses

In November the Society arranged its first seminar under the title "The City is far more than office blocks" which provided the opportunity to consider the advantages of greater diversity of use for buildings in the City.

The seminar, at The Gallery, Cowcross Street, Smithfield, was addressed by a distinguished panel of speakers and was attended by a large number of our members and specially invited guests representing all aspects of the City's property world.

In his opening address the Chairman said "The substantial fall in the number of people coming to work in the City and the empty buildings we see around us are reminders that for a healthy and prosperous future we need more than banks, insurance offices and dealing floors — important as they are."

He suggested there could be an expansion in shipping interests, a reinvigorated St. Bartholomews Hospital as the focus for a new centre of medical research, widened educational activity, more activity centred on the arts and expansion of marketing and communications interests. All this could be backed up with more housing — "a good way to put new life into old buildings no longer wanted as offices" — with a boost for shops and leisure pursuits.



*City Heritage Award 1997:
The Chairman with the
Lord Mayor, Sir Roger Cork,
for the presentation at the
Lothbury Art Gallery.*

The Society hopes that these ideas for greater diversity of uses can be incorporated into the City's UDP (see above) so that they become a more positive part of the City's blueprint for development over the coming years.

In regard to St. Bartholomew's Hospital, the Society submitted comments in September to the London Review Advisory Panel, chaired by Sir Leslie Turnberg, which has been considering the future for London's hospitals. We argued that not only were hospital facilities at Smithfield necessary on social grounds, but that in economic terms the hospital could provide a centre for a variety of related medical/educational uses. We were delighted to learn early in 1998 that Barts is likely to continue at Smithfield.

City Heritage Award 1997

The twentieth City Heritage Award was presented in June 1997 to the National Westminster Bank for the creation within its former head office and banking hall of the new Lothbury Art Gallery. The assessors gave particular praise for NatWest's generosity in dedicating this great space as a new public amenity in the City.

Planning Applications

During 1997 comments were submitted to the City Corporation on a number of planning applications including the following:-

Britannic Tower, Moor Lane: We believe that the slightly lower spire now proposed would still be highly disruptive of the City skyline, especially in relation to St. Paul's. In this regard Britannic House is already one of the worst offenders and certainly should not be any higher. The desire for a large floorplate — if it is necessary (which we doubt) — could be achieved by increasing the width of the building or making a parallel slab with atrium in between.

Note: The proposals were subsequently amended with the removal of the spire feature so that the new height of the building would be only 2m higher than the existing. This revised scheme was approved in December.

138 Cheapside: This scheme for an open-air cafe would enliven and improve a left-over space.

68-74 Carter Lane: Welcome change of use to residential — an ideal solution for unwanted office/warehouse buildings of this kind and in this area.

15-17 Furnival Street: The proposed office block is a dreary, unimaginative building — particularly regrettable on the west facade which adjoins two very good Georgian buildings. There is a case for a replica on this facade. On the Furnival Street frontage, the Patent Office — a good Victorian building — deserves a better neighbour. The architects should be told to try again.

3-6 Gracechurch Street: The replacement proposed for this unlovely building of 1964, heavy neo-Edwardian, is more in accord with its neighbours. Welcome the improvement to Corbet Court and a new alley to St. Peter's Church.

53-57 Carter Lane etc: Years ago we suggested refurbishment of this interesting collection of buildings which have now long been derelict. The proposal to use them for residential purposes is greatly welcomed. The semi-replica facades proposed for Wardrobe Place, Addle Hill and Carter Lane look convincing and two listed facades are retained.

Barrington House, 59-67 Gresham Street: Similar bulk to the building of 1956 with larger floor plates using atria. Better modelling of the facades and shaping at the corners.

Woolgate House, 25 Coleman Street: The proposed replacement is better in terms of open space on Basinghall Street than the existing 1964 building and much better than an earlier scheme. Far from architecturally distinguished and a pity that the pedestrian way from Coleman Street would be lost.

140 Aldersgate Street: Interesting and welcome land use for hotel, restaurant and retail. Pity it is architecturally so undistinguished. Why do architects working in the City come up with such unimaginative schemes?

30-35 Botolph Lane, etc: Welcome residential use in this lane, ideally suited to flats.

Broken Wharf House, High Timber Street: Welcome another residential scheme but we wonder whether people will actually want to live in this traffic laden area of the City.

16-17 Old Bailey: The proposal to refurbish this good Victorian building is applauded and the replacement of the boring building behind it with a light and airy office scheme round an atrium fits well with Fleet Place.

1-3 Ludgate Square: Good proposal to reinstate fire-damaged building with fourteen flats and restaurant.

47-51 King William Street, etc: The seven-storey office block continues the pattern of adjoining buildings. Unremarkable but acceptable.

Blackfriars House, 19 New Bridge Street: These works, converting an empty listed office building into a 200 bedroom hotel, will undo some of the regrettable features of the earlier 1970 refurbishment.

4-6 Aldersgate Street: The entry by bridge over the Roman Wall Bridge in Noble Street is an imaginative touch. Good landscape proposals relating to the wall and churchyard of St. Anne and St. Agnes.

171 -176 Aldersgate Street: Welcome change to residential use. New frontage rather pretentious sub-neo-art-deco. Fourteen floors at southern end seems too high but there is a stepping down to the north in line with neighbours.

King Edward Buildings, Newgate Street, King Edward Street: Much to commend, particularly that this long neglected area is to be given new life. Pleased that the listed Public Office Building (the old post office) is to be retained and refurbished, together with the listed Newgate Street facade of the Sorting Office Building. Regret proposed demolition of 102-105 Newgate Street. Applaud proposal for pedestrian through route. Architecture unremarkable (no bad thing!). Major reservation is in regard to the enormous size of the main new building proposed — too great a mass for the City of London.

Daily Express Building, Fleet Street: So large, so monolithic. If this goes through the Planning Committee should require a public passage way across this deep site.

Tenter House, Moorfields: Removal of dull 1960's building welcomed, with the squalid car ramp going. Retail units also to be welcomed.

41 Eastcheap, 16 Rood Lane: Not greatly impressed, the style not appropriate for this significant corner site. (The application was subsequently withdrawn).

68-70 Fenchurch Street: We were pleased that our objections to this Richard Rogers scheme helped persuade the Planning Committee to refuse the application for demolition and new construction.

Plantation House, Fenchurch Street: The existing building provides valuable small-scale office accommodation and it would be a great pity to lose an important commercial asset. The proposed three new blocks enclosing a galleria would be a new City experience, standing out as absolutely different from all its neighbours, so we have strong reservations. It could however provide a building of quality. If it goes ahead we would advise taking off four floors off the central building — still leaving 23! At present, too tall for the skyline and as to precedent

Events

The Society's programme of events in 1997 included an evening visit to London's oldest synagogue at Bevis Marks, a return visit to the treasure of the Charterhouse, another of Desmond Fitzpatrick's popular walks (in Westminster this time), an evening reception to see the splendours of the Lothbury Art Gallery — and, of course, the Seminar referred to above.

THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 1996/1997

C. Douglas Woodward CBE	Chairman
Norman Searle	Deputy Chairman
Desmond Fitzpatrick	Deputy Chairman
Gordon Rees	Hon. Treasurer
Ann Woodward	Membership Secretary and Social Events
R T D Wilmot	
Anthony Hemy	
James Thomas	
Barbara Allan	Hon. Secretary

Planning Applications:	Anthony Noaks Desmond Fitzpatrick Anthony Hemy
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Conservation Area Advisory Committee:
Messrs. Fitzpatrick, Searle and Thomas are members of CAAC and provide a valuable link with CHS

CITY HERITAGE AWARD 1997

The Lothbury Gallery, London EC2

Owner: NatWest Group Property

Architect: DEG W

Contractor: Try Construction Limited

ASSESSORS TO THE AWARD

Ashley Barker OBE FSA FRIBA AADipl

Lady 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

Matthew Saunders BA Cantab,
Ancient Monuments Society

A F Shannon ARIBA AADip,
Worshipful Company of Painter-Stainers

C. Douglas Woodward CBE,
Chairman, City Heritage