



# CITY HERITAGE SOCIETY

## ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1999

### *The Baltic tower a cause for grave concern*

The Society's twenty-sixth year has seen a vast amount of building redevelopment across the City, the outcome of planning approvals in earlier years. In July 1999 the total amount of space under construction was estimated at 445,000 sq.m (source: Drivers Jonas 'Crane Survey').

Although we had criticised a number of these developments as being unnecessarily overlarge, our greatest concern came late in 1999 with the re-emergence from Lord Foster's architectural practice of a second skyscraper scheme for the Baltic Exchange site, St. Mary Axe. City Heritage has been in the forefront of opposition to this proposal which, if approved, would in our view represent a major planning disaster for the City.

Members will recall that in 1997 Norman Foster had proposed something even more astonishing for this same site – a tower rising to 1200 feet, twice the height of the excessively high National Westminster tower. In the face of universal condemnation this scheme – which Foster believed to be a 'perfect design solution' for the site – was eventually withdrawn.

The current proposal, although only half as high, is, in the Society's view, just as unacceptable. Our concerns were set out in detail in a submission given to the City Corporation in September. Briefly, they were as follows:

- The tower would be grossly to overdevelop the site. It would overshadow and dominate all the neighbouring buildings.
- The intrusive nature of its phallus-shaped top would ruin views across the City.
- The highly distinctive and obtrusive shape would directly challenge St Paul's Cathedral.
- The structure, wildly disproportionate to its surroundings, ignores the principles of going with the grain of a neighbourhood. Its effect on nearby buildings would be deplorable.
- It would adversely affect the adjoining St. Helens and Bank Conservation areas and most of the City's other 26 conservation areas.

We pointed out that while the skyscraper's capacity is for more than 4,000 occupants, Swiss Reinsurance which is the client company, only employs some 800 people in the City so that its accommodation needs would be met with a building far smaller than the Foster tower.

We also said that in Zurich, home of the Swiss Re, it would be inconceivable for the City Council to permit

such a building. The same is true of other historic commercial cities such as Paris, Amsterdam, Milan or Munich. In these cities they adhere to absolute rules on scale and skyline. The City of London should show equal respect for its historic environment.

There is evidence world-wide that skyscraper buildings are, anyway, falling out of favour. They are no longer being built in the United States and towers across the USA are emptying. Skyscrapers are today distrusted in the Far East.

The reasons are obvious. High buildings are inefficient in that so much of their space is taken up by lifts, stairs and shafts. They have inherent energy drawbacks. Such towers become white elephants which owners eventually find awkward and very expensive to demolish.

Not surprisingly, English Heritage reported in 1997 that skyscrapers were destroying London's position as one of the world's most attractive and popular cities and that there should be no more.

There is another fundamental objection to the Foster scheme. It dismisses the possibility of rebuilding the battered but surviving Grade II\* former Baltic Exchange building. We and others have always believed that these remains should be the basis for a reconstruction on this site. English Heritage, their joint custodian with the City Corporation, assured us in 1996 that the remains were 'positive'.

All the relevant City-based bodies have objected to the tower proposal – St. Paul's, Tower of London, Baltic Exchange, the Retailers Association, Conservation Area Advisory Committee and the Ward Club where the tower would rise. The national amenity bodies – Victorian Society, Georgian Group and the London Society have all objected.

At the time this report went to the printer it was expected that the application would, after considerable delays, be considered by the City's Planning Committee in February. We hope the Committee will have the sense to reject this scheme. If that is not the case we would expect a matter of such public concern to be referred to the City's governing body, the Court of Common Council. If approval was given there we would look to the Secretary of State to call in the scheme for public enquiry.

Meanwhile a small display has been arranged at St. Mary-le-Bow Church which indicates the impact this scheme would have on the City. We hope that in the first weeks of the year 2000 it will be seen by many people in the City and they will react accordingly.



Award line-up: From left to right: The Lord Mayor of London; Sir Brian Pitman, Chairman Lloyds TSB; the Lady Mayoress; C. Douglas Woodward, Chairman, City Heritage Society and Reg Houghton, Master of the Worshipful Company of Painter-Stainers.

## The City Heritage Award 1999

Happily there were more pleasing features in 1999, notably the twenty-second City Heritage Award for excellence in building conservation presented to Lloyds TSB for the major refurbishment of its premises at 71 Lombard Street. A Grade II\* listed building, it was designed in the grand manner by Sir John Burnett in the late 1920's.

As with many of the City's banking halls, the palatial colonnaded ground floor was no longer required for counter banking purposes but, unlike some other bank refurbishments, Lloyds TSB are commendably continuing to use the whole of the building as their City headquarters.

The Assessors praised the sensitivity and care taken by the in-house architect and commended the way in which a redundant banking hall had been given a highly-appropriate new function as a reception area and handsome meeting rooms.

The Award is presented jointly each year by the City Heritage Society and the Worshipful Company of Painter-Stainers.

**Owner** Lloyds TSB plc  
**Architect** Julian Castle with support from SGM  
**Contractor** Bovis Construction Ltd

## Membership

We are pleased to record that during 1999 a number of City livery companies became new Corporate Members of the Society: Apothecaries, Butchers, Carpenters, Gardeners, Goldsmiths (as 'life' members), Pewterers, Salters, Tylers and Bricklayers, Watermen and Lightermen, and Wax Chandlers.

They join companies which have been long-time supporters: Fishmongers, Mercers and Painter-Stainers.

We are particularly pleased to have livery companies as

members since we share with them a special concern for the history and traditions of the City.

We would also take this opportunity of recognising the valued contribution made over the years by those other corporate members: City of London Retail Traders Association, Cripplegate Foundation and Clifford Chance which, for some 20 years, has made a most welcome financial contribution to the Society's work.

## Revision of the Unitary Development Plan

The Society's detailed comments on the updating of the City's Unitary Development Plan of 1994 were made at the end of 1998, as reported in last year's

Annual Report. No further action was called for from us during 1999. The Corporation published its latest proposals in December and the Society will be making its responses during the public consultation period which ends on 21 February 2000.

A fundamental recommendation by the Society called for restoration of the 'plot ratio' formula to restrict the height and bulk of future building in the City. We are all too well aware that such a move would be anathema to the powerful development lobby in the City.

We were therefore greatly heartened to learn that we are not entirely alone on this and that English Heritage have thrown their weight behind this proposal also. In their comments English Heritage said:

'On a more fundamental level, we would urge the Corporation to consider the reintroduction of plot ratio as an objective and equitable means of judging the bulk of proposed new development (and the scale and consequential congestion), and of controlling over-development and the loss of open space in front of existing high buildings. Recent proposals for the redevelopment of the Moor House site on London Wall are examples of how the absence of a policy on plot ratio has resulted in schemes which would not only increase the height of development over that of the existing, but infill almost all the open space in front of the existing tower block and create a 'canyon' effect in a street which only 35 years ago was of modest domestic scale on both sides. We consider that design controls without intelligent plot ratio constraints have not been successful in containing bulk of development during the period of the adopted UDP.'

The Society will do all in its power to achieve restoration of plot ratio control which is at the centre of our past and present concerns for the way the City's buildings are being developed – up to and including making a case at the public enquiry which will probably take place late in 2000. We are delighted to have at least one powerful ally in this campaign.

## Planning applications

During 1999, in addition to the case against the Baltic tower proposal, the Society commented on more than 40 other planning applications. Here are some extracts:

**29 Gresham Street** Disappointed that this revised plan would still have a seriously deleterious effect on Pewterers Hall.

**2-12 Hosier Lane** Commend this imaginative development of offices, flats and restaurants, the elevations varied to give an impression of several quite separate buildings.

**66-73 Shoe Lane** Demolition of the ugly buildings on this site welcomed. The new buildings are an enormous improvement with a number of praiseworthy features including a new public space. Could however be over-development and we suggest reduction in height of at least one storey.

**6 Eldon Street** Existing building a poor thing and the replacement a positive improvement. Would have preferred a slightly more distinguished facade to link with the church. Height should be reduced, however, to line up with neighbours.

**1-3 Ludgate Square** Interesting and handsome replacement of fire-damaged building. Commend the warehouse-style windows and brickwork to match original. Appropriate conversion to residential use. Proposed height slightly excessive, however.

**29-32 King Street** Chief concern is that the King Street facades should be retained. Height should be no greater than neighbouring buildings. There is a most unwelcome tendency for developers to push up with each new application the height of our streets.

**Public Records Office, Chancery Lane** We warmly commend this excellent refurbishment project to provide library and information facilities for King's College. Provides within the City the kind of valuable 'non-office' use that is vital as demand for office space shrinks.

**12 Arthur Street** Doubt whether the building proposed would improve the local environment. Doubling the existing amount of office space it would appear overbearing. The monotonous elevations would not respect the attractive buildings of the Laurence Pountney Hill conservation area.

**101 Queen Victoria Street** Clever of architects to create 17,500 sq.m of new offices compared with 12,200 sq.m currently, without increasing height. Not inspired architecture but one wishes the Salvation Army well!

**40-53 Threadneedle Street** Much impressed by first scheme for this large site between Old Broad Street and Threadneedle Street and continue to like this one. The potential to be a City Heritage Award winner.

**8-10 Coopers Row** Highly commendable scheme for conversion of ugly 1960's office building into a large hotel. Main elevation improved with use of Portland stone panels and interesting new entrance.

**16-28 Ludgate Hill** Good site near St. Paul's for hotel to replace redundant office block. But is the City, so long devoid of hotels, now facing a glut?

**2-18 St. Bride Street** Good office scheme retaining attractive facades of the notable triangular building on corner of Farringdon and St. Bride Streets.

**7-10 Old Bailey** Applaud the rebuilding of the front elevation making use of existing stonework. Office use is appropriate, together with restaurant at lower levels. Welcome intention to reveal section of Roman Wall. Architects commended for providing such an excellent planning statement. Would that others were so helpful!

**Buckingham House, 62-63 Queen Street** Pleased that total demolition will not now take place and that the buildings would be upgraded. We wonder at the statement that 'the majority of facades are retained' since it appears that the Prince Rupert House and College Hill facades would in fact go!

**32 St. Mary-at-Hill** Fairly ghastly modern building and the refurbishment would result in improved elevations. With all the demolition taking place in the City one comes to welcome such refurbishments which contrive to turn ugly buildings into something more acceptable.

**Northcliffe House, 26 Tudor Street** We agreed with the requirement in the original planning consent that the great printing press should be retained (along with the building facade) as a permanent reminder and record of the past. The press should stay in the building, not transferred to a distant museum as is now proposed.

**25 Milk Street** We cannot understand how the new building proposed – seven storeys as against the existing three or four – would only provide 6,500 sq.m of office space compared with the existing 6,000 sq.m. The best feature about the not particularly distinguished buildings in Milk Street is their modest height which seems about right in this area between Guildhall and Cheapside. City Heritage would prefer any new buildings to stay around four storeys.

**30-32 Fleet Street** Commendable refurbishment which would reinstate original features that had been lost. The important office and retail facades are retained and improved. Welcome proposal for a passageway linking Falcon Court with Fleet Street. Clearly this would be a contender for a future City Heritage Award.

**68 King William Street** Splendid solution in finding new uses for this handsome listed building – the lower storeys becoming a department store. Existing stone facades to be cleaned and repaired. Another potential conservation award winner.

**Austral House, Basinghall Avenue** Hard to understand how the architects can create 21,000 sq.m of office space when only 9,500 sq.m exists. Could the bulk of the new building have adverse effects on neighbours, particularly Girdlers Hall? Proposed building is better architecturally and we especially like the oval footprint.

**St. Botolph's House, 138-139 Houndsditch** From some six storeys and 18,000 sq.m this proposal goes up to 13 storeys and 72,000 sq.m which strikes us as greedy. We welcome demolition of the existing undistinguished post-war buildings but would prefer a building of greater architectural and environmental quality. In particular we should like to see some public open space to enhance St. Botolph's Church and Sir John Cass School which face the site.

**St. Swithin's House, Walbrook** The three buildings on this site are undistinguished post-war plus an ugly 1970's refurbishment. We welcome their demise. The building proposed (yet another from the Foster practice) is not all that bad. The objection is that it would be a massive development going up from the existing 40,000 sq.m to 60,000 sq.m and because it would fill every inch of space, largely to the maximum height, the effect from ground level and around Walbrook, Canon Street and St. Swithin's Lane could be overpowering. To lessen the impact it is proposed that the main facades would be curved but we are concerned that such a treatment could have an adverse effect on all the neighbouring 'straight-up' buildings and that it could present a somewhat drunken look, unpleasant to those looking up at it. How marvellous it would have been on such a big site to have given a little of it over to open space, to achieve an impression of greater airiness and light through the site. We could not possibly agree with the statement that such a massive building would 'enhance' the nearby conservation areas or listed buildings. Such a statement is plainly ridiculous.

City Heritage Award – Lord Mayor's arrival at the sumptuously refurbished Lombard Street Bank.



## Events 1999

- Annual General Meeting, Guildhall Club
- Visit to the City University Club and talk on Cornhill's buildings by Desmond Fitzpatrick
- Pre-opening visit to new Guildhall Art Gallery conducted by City Surveyor and Curator of the City's Art Collection.
- A visit to Morden College, Blackheath
- The City Heritage Society dinner, Pewterers Hall
- Tour of London Fire Brigade Museum (through our membership of the Victorian Society)

### THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

<b>C. Douglas Woodward CBE</b>	<b>Chairman</b>
<b>Norman Searle J.P.</b>	<b>Deputy Chairman</b>
<b>Desmond Fitzpatrick</b>	<b>Deputy Chairman</b>
<b>Ann Woodward</b>	<b>Membership Secretary</b>
<b>Peter Duggan</b>	<b>Social Events</b>
<b>Barbara Allan</b>	<b>Hon. Secretary</b>
<b>Sidney Morton</b>	<b>Hon. Treasurer</b>
<b>R T D Wilmot C.C.</b>	
<b>Anthony Hemy ARIBA</b>	
<b>James Thomas BA Arch, Dip TP, FRIBA</b>	

### CITY HERITAGE AWARD

#### THE ASSESSORS

**Desmond Fitzpatrick**  
*City Heritage Society*

**Lady Freeman, BA, Dip.Cons(AA)**  
*London Advisory Committee of the Historic Buildings  
and Monuments Commission for England*

**R.C. Houghton, Dip.Arch, RIBA**  
*Worshipful Company of Painter-Stainers*

**Peter Wynne Rees, BSc, BArch, BTP, RIBA, MRTPI**  
*Corporation of London*

**Matthew Saunders, MBE, MA, FSA, IHBC**  
*Ancient Monuments Society*

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

**C. Douglas Woodward, CBE**  
*City Heritage Society*