

# CITY HERITAGE SOCIETY

## ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2000

### *Awards lighten “annus horibilis”*

In a year described by the Chairman at our annual dinner as an “annus horibilis”, the happiest features of 2000 were the City Heritage awards for conservation and for new architecture.

The award for outstanding excellence in building conservation was presented for the reinstatement of 41-42 Cloth Fair, Smithfield, as a house in domestic occupation. This unique survival, dating from the early part of the 17th century, was rescued from the results of an office “modernisation” during the 1980’s, which left walls, staircase and other parts of the structure in an extremely sorry state. The two-year programme of work was highly praised by the Assessors for the loving care lavished on the house to ensure its preservation for the future.

#### **41-42 Cloth Fair**

Owner	Mrs Penelope Cenci di Bello
Architect	Andrea Cenci
Contractor	Lister Joinery and Totus Design

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

The City Heritage New Architecture Award was introduced in 1991 by the Worshipful Company of Chartered Architects in partnership with CHS, but was allowed to lapse for some years largely because the Chartered Architects did not consider there to have been any new buildings in the City of sufficient merit for an award.



Line-up at Cloth Fair: Sheriff Finch, Master Painter-Stainer, Lady Mayoress, Mrs Cenci di Bello, the Lord Mayor, Andrea Cenci and Douglas Woodward.

In the year 2000 there were, happily, a number of contenders, but the Assessors unanimously agreed that the award should go to the art gallery and offices of the new Guildhall Yard East – a building which, commented our Chairman, “sits so very comfortably beside the ancient Guildhall, complementary to it in every way and yet so clearly a building of its own time, displaying equal excellence within as without”.

#### **Guildhall East Wing**

Owner	Corporation of London
Architect	Richard Gilbert Scott
Contractor	John Mowlem PLC

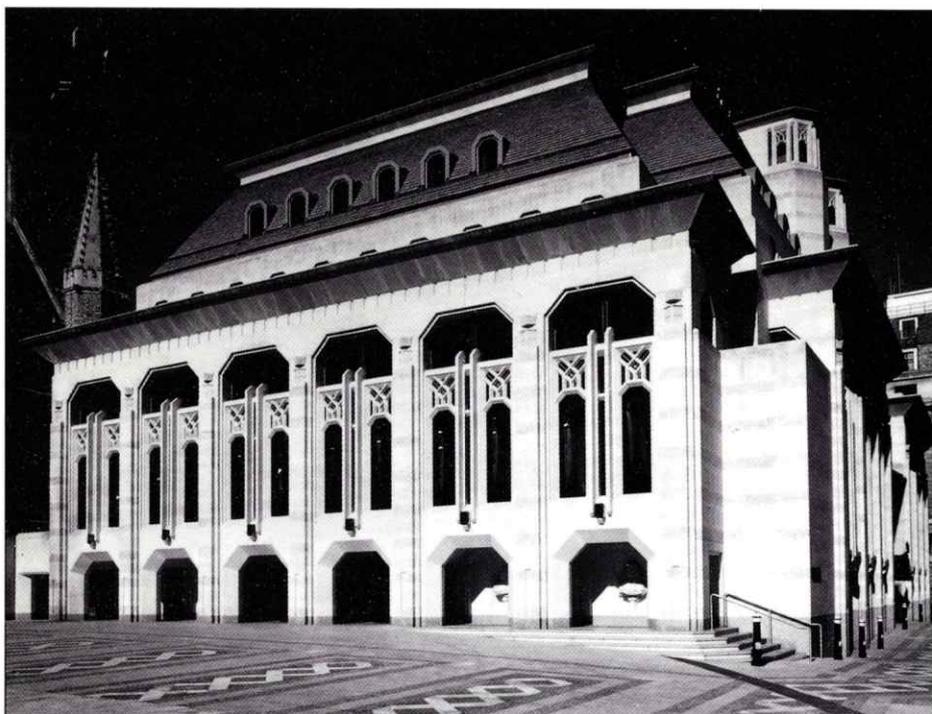
### **The Baltic disaster**

The great planning disaster of the year 2000 was the City Corporation’s approval of the destruction of the former Baltic Exchange, a Grade II\* listed building, the substantial remains of which should have been lovingly rebuilt on the site. In its place we are to have Foster’s 600-foot-high skyscraper.

Much of the year was spent by us and others of like mind in trying to ensure that the proposal for the tower would not win approval and that the remains of the Baltic should be recreated as part of a new building appropriate for this site.

In addition to our formal submission to the City Planning Officer we wrote individually to all 33 members of the Planning Committee in January pointing out that the tower was wildly disproportionate to its surroundings, ignored the principle of “going with the grain” of the neighbourhood, as much out of context as would be the Eiffel Tower dropped on to St. Mary Axe; and suggesting that we should be as proud in the City to reinstate the commercial Baltic as we are to recreate the spiritual St. Ethelburga; reminding them that almost every organisation in the City objected to the skyscraper proposal.

Exhibition panels showing the impact the tower would make were produced for us by James Thomas and, with the Rector’s approbation, displayed in the porch area of St. Mary-le-Bow Church.



The new Guildhall East building.

Just before the Planning Committee met on 23 February, research among members of the Committee convinced us that on that day a substantial majority would have voted against the proposal.

Alas, at the same time, a request for an Environmental Impact Assessment was being made – for the best of possible motives – by the management of the Baltic Exchange and this request, shortly afterwards agreed by the Secretary of State for the Environment, had the effect of stopping discussion on 23 February and postponement of a decision until July.

In the intervening months members of the Planning Committee had been persuaded to believe that if Swiss Re and Kvaerner were not allowed to have their skyscraper in St. Mary Axe they might possibly – perish the thought! – leave the City for Canary Wharf or some other location.

The persuasion worked and in July the Planning Committee first, and then the Court of Common Council, approved the application for demolition of the Baltic and the building of the tower.

Much of the blame for this planning disaster lies with English Heritage whose London Advisory Committee – against the expert advice of its own officers and seduced by the thought of a Norman Foster building – set aside their duty to protect highly-graded listed buildings and let it be known that the tower found favour in their eyes, a view all-too-eagerly rubber-stamped by the Chairman of English Heritage and his commissioners. The decision is incomprehensible, particularly in view of the fact that earlier English Heritage had insisted on a brick-by-brick replacement of the Exchange.

This sorry story continued to plumb new depths when the Secretary of State, who we and others called upon to set up a

Public Enquiry, refused to do so in spite of the overwhelming case for such an enquiry.

Simon Jenkins in the Evening Standard on 24 August wrote: “Mr Prescott is specifically charged with calling in such decisions when they conflict with national policies... have effect beyond locality... and give rise to significant national controversy. I believe that he has acted outside his public duty in aiding a powerful and rich developer to benefit from wanton destruction”. The City Heritage Society wholeheartedly agrees.

Now of course the floodgates are open with the promise of other skyscrapers in the City and adjoining areas. We learn, without surprise, that Mr Livingston likes them.

English Heritage in its better days (1997) said that skyscrapers were destroying

London’s position as one of the world’s most attractive and popular cities and there should be no more. We can only hope that with Sir Jocelyn Stevens’ departure from English Heritage and the coming of a new Chairman, that body will recall its proper duty as a conservation body.

## Other planning matters

During the year 2000 City Heritage commented on more than 40 other planning applications.

Some, new buildings as well as refurbishments, we welcomed. Our chief cause for concern and criticism, however, was in regard to the size of many of the buildings proposed both in bulk and height and the tendency for developers to replace several existing buildings with just one (or two) very large ones. Aesthetically and architecturally, we believe that such developments spoil, for ever, the character of the City; economically we fear they could be gravely misconceived in view of the diminishing demand for very large floor plates as mergers and take-overs inevitably reduce the number of financial sector companies left in the market.

Here are extracts from our submissions to the City planners:

**25 Old Broad Street.** The application rightly points to the awfulness of this area at the foot of the NatWest tower. These proposals seek to reduce the bleakness. “It will never be a Rockefeller Plaza but the additions will help a little”.

**Former Post Office building, King Edward Street.** Internal alterations on upper floors acceptable. Would have been helpful for the applicants to have told us how the building is to be used. Museum use would seem appropriate.

**Land bounded by Tudor Street and Temple Avenue.** We favour maximum retention of facades of the existing attractive buildings. The new office buildings proposed seem to line up broadly with facades to be retained. There would be an unfortunate clash of styles without a rethink.

**87-95 Queen Victoria Street.** Present "Walker House" is nondescript post-war. The objective said to be to "maximise commercial use" on this site. A pity, for with such a large site it would be better to incorporate some improvement of the street scene.

**30 Gresham Street.** This proposed replacement for Blossoms Inn is a disappointment in that the existing four buildings would be replaced by one massive construction. Here, by Guildhall and St. Lawrence Jewry, is a marvellous opportunity for a truly interesting development making use of the historic courts to create a new hub of interest. All that the developers offer is a massive development providing very large dealing floors.

**14-18 Gresham Street.** Another enormous speculative development with an increase of nearly 40% of floorspace sought. We dislike the elevational treatment – glass and metal – which will clash with almost everything else, old and new, along Gresham Street.

**1-3 Kings Arms Yard.** Elevations proposed, new and retained, acceptable. We are not happy about the treatment for the churchyard elevation, however, which should be more in tune with those on Kings Arms and Tokenhouse Yards.

**Land bounded by New Fetter Lane and West Harding Street.** Another massive and not very attractive development combining seven existing, nondescript, buildings into a single entity rising to 21 storeys and 94,000 sq.m. of largely office space against 51,000 existing. A large glass wedge at the centre would dominate the Temples and everything else around it. We hope for a substantial diminution in height and bulk. There should be several separate buildings on this very large site both on architectural grounds and to guard against the City being left with a massive white elephant.

**2 Puddle Dock and Mermaid Theatre.** Interesting proposal in an area not noted for post-war architectural excellence. But we are concerned about three of the four elevational treatments. The developers, to get the vast dealing floors they say are wanted, and limited to five storeys because of St. Paul's height regulations, are proposing very long elevations east-to-west which would look boring. If the building has to be so long the elevations cry out to be broken up. While appreciating the architects' attempts to create a modern building, we feel that the rather gimmicky treatment proposed is more Canary Wharf than City of London.

**Re-erection of Temple Bar.** We greatly welcome this proposal, which would be a splendid addition to the Paternoster development close by St. Paul's and the Chapter House.

**Plantation Place.** A previous consent for this enormous development was for 95,000 sq.m. of office space. This

application asks for more than 101,000 sq.m. and one wonders how it will ever be filled. There would be two buildings only on the site and it would have been sensible to have considered (as with Paternoster) far more separate, individual buildings. One of the two, the "Fenchurch" building, would loom over all its surroundings. Views from various parts of the City would be affected.

**34-37 Bartholomew Close.** Admirable new use – doctors' surgery – for an unwanted warehouse building.

**168 Fenchurch Street.** City Heritage is totally opposed to skyscrapers in the City and this proposed 34-floor tower does not even have the excuse of being part of the much-quoted "cluster" around the NatWest tower. If it were to be approved it would clearly signal the City Corporation's intention to scrap all the existing rules about high buildings, the final triumph of greedy development over civilized planning.

**Bow Bells House, Bread Street.** Stylish design but Cheapside elevation should be reduced by at least one storey to avoid overwhelming St. Mary-Le-Bow Church. (Subsequent revised application did, in fact, offer "step-back" at upper level although we were still concerned about impact on church.)

**Stone House, 142-148 Bishopsgate.** Suggestions for a mixed redevelopment and refurbishment are reasonably acceptable and the scheme can be described as conservation based. We welcome retention of Stone House and Cavendish courtyards, also a new arcade and increase in retail space.

**25 Southampton Buildings and 10 Furnival Street.** We applaud these well thought-out proposals for the Grade II\* listed former Patent Office providing cellular accommodation of 26,000 sq.m. for a variety of professional users. Facades largely retained and improved, the Staple Inn Elevation returning to the original 1843 design.

**106-126 Bishopsgate.** City Heritage is against any more City skyscrapers. It is stated that the tower would "create a new outlook" for neighbouring office occupants and residents, certainly something of an understatement since it would diminish everything around it – St. Botolph's Church, listed buildings over a wide surrounding area, and would adversely affect five conservation areas.

**5 Cheapside.** Good news that the owners have decided to refurbish the octagonal rotunda which has become such a feature at this end of Cheapside.

**Minorities Car park, Tower Hill.** Removal of the ugly car park with a reasonably attractive glass-fronted office building would much improve this dreary part of the City. We are concerned, however, as to where the 200-300 cars using the car park will be relocated.

**15-17 Furnival Street, 12-13 Took's Court.** We like this scheme with its attractive elevations replacing the BT "bunker". The yellow stock bricks will match the adjoining former Patent Office.

# New Unitary Development Plan

The wheels turn slowly on the updating of the City's first UDP published in 1994. Some of our concerns about the revision have been withdrawn during the lengthy process of consultation but on four major aspects we remain highly critical and shall be arguing our case at the Public Enquiry taking place in Guildhall in April/May 2001.

The areas that cause us special concern are as follows:

- **The demand for office space.** The draft UDP forecasts an increase in financial sector employment when prevailing economic factors suggest the reverse. It is on this, in our view, false premise that the UDP argues for large floorplate buildings, groundscrapers and skyscrapers. We maintain that the UDP should acknowledge the prospect of a diminishing financial sector workforce, thus giving greater strength and credibility to the promotion of mixed and other uses for buildings, and for buildings of more modest dimensions.
- **Overlarge buildings.** Proposals in the draft UDP will not effectively control the bulk and massing of new buildings and we argue in favour of reintroduction of "plot ratio" together with a call for new building development to fit into immediate surroundings.
- **High buildings.** The draft UDP positively encourages provision of high buildings "where they would enhance the City's skyline and not adversely affect the character and amenities of their surroundings to an unacceptable degree". We maintain that high buildings cannot enhance the City's skyline and would clearly have an adverse affect on their surroundings. We will argue the case.
- **Transport.** We argue that the draft UDP is a catalogue of restrictive measures and that in their stead should be desirable objectives to ease traffic flow by such means as identification of traffic blackspots and their elimination or reduction, restriction of roadworks and imposition of street no-parking and unloading regulations.

## Events during the year

- February: Tour of the splendid interior of the Prudential building in Holborn.
- March: Our Annual General Meeting in Wax Chandlers Hall.
- April: Conducted tour of the former Royal Naval College, Greenwich.
- May: Tour by coach of buildings contending for the City Heritage Award and visit to the winning entry in Cloth Fair.
- August: Visit and talk, Christ Church, Spitalfields.
- September: Visit and talk, Ragged Schools Museum.
- October: Tour of Ernest Debenham House, Holland Park.
- November: Our Annual Dinner at Wax Chandlers Hall.

## 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 and 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>	
<b>Peter Duggan</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*