

# CITY HERITAGE SOCIETY

## ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1992

**H**as the glut of City office space been something to welcome or to deplore? Arguments have been advanced that the over-supply of office space has brought benefits in that for those in the market looking for space it has made available a wide choice of high-quality accommodation at comparatively low rents. Such arguments may however seem hollow, particularly when so much of the new accommodation remains unused and when sites which have been cleared of their previous buildings remain empty. It is the Society's view that changes need to be made in planning policies to try to correct the existing imbalance in the years ahead.

It was with this purpose that the Society submitted objections to the City of London Unitary Development Plan which, when it is finally agreed, will act as the blueprint for City development for the next ten to twenty years.

In October 1992 the Chairman gave evidence on behalf of the Society at the public enquiry called for by the Secretary of State for the Environment.

We asked that the Plan should acknowledge the fact that economic circumstances had changed and that there existed in the City an over-abundant supply of office floor space. In ignoring this fact it is our opinion that the plan is out of date before it is even published, being stuck in time with the situation as it existed in 1987.

We have similarly objected to the plan's over-optimistic forecast that the City's workforce is likely to increase beyond the 300,000 figure of recent years. The Society believes that planning policies should envisage a smaller, not a larger, employment base for the City.

Our third objection was to ask for a change in the City's "plot ratio" reducing it from the present 5.1:1 to 4:1. In 1985 the City increased the then plot ratios, some of which were as low as 2:1, to an overall 5:1, a change formally ratified in 1989. The clearly stated purpose then was to use plot ratio as a means to encourage and facilitate the City building boom then being actively promoted. In 1991 plot ratio was increased again to 5.1:1. Our suggestion was put forward in the same spirit – to act as a signal that because there is today so much empty office space the City should now positively be encouraging the design of buildings of smaller scale. The 5.1:1 plot ratio is demonstrably not appropriate in a time of glut. We have argued that developments significantly higher than 4:1 should not normally be permitted so as to preclude over the coming years too many more of the enormous and unsuitable developments which have been – and are still being – approved in the City.

We have not been alone in expressing concern about the over-supply of office space. The London Business School in a report published in July last pointed to a gradual dispersion of financial firms away from the City core and argued that this process of decentralization was likely to be in the City's best interests as it would serve to enhance productivity of the firms concerned and to encourage more centralization of "front" offices – that is the headquarters type of operation for which a City location is desirable.

Edward Erdman, the international property firm, said also in July that the real central London office vacancy ratio was 27 per cent and that there would be no return to the 1989 employment levels until at least the year 2000. The writer of that report suggested that a total embargo on new planning applications would be a good idea for the City at the present time!

The Society has always been in the forefront of those advocating the City's continued place as an international centre of commerce and finance. Our modest suggestion that we should now accept the reality of a changed financial climate and to signal a more realistic approach to future planning policies would, we believe, help to maintain and indeed enhance the City's future prospects. To have more and more "for sale" and "to let" notices and so many empty buildings and sites is certainly not good for the City's image.



*The Lord Mayor presents the 1992 Heritage Award flanked by the Master of Painters-Stainers and Chairman of City Heritage*



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## PATERNOSTER AND OTHER PLANNING APPLICATIONS

**T**he proposals for the urgently needed redevelopment of Paternoster Square, now standing empty and forlorn beside St. Paul's, were substantially improved during 1992, reflecting comments made by the Society and others.

We still believe that the scheme represents over-development and, as the City Planning Officer has pointed out, the volume of the development proposed is the absolute maximum that could be permitted on this site without conflicting with the policies of our – already generous – local plan.

We are disappointed that the scheme concentrates to such a great extent on provision of new office space. Surely the developers should in their own long-term interests widen their sights to include more non-office uses, not least residential accommodation, possibly a hotel. Thought needs to be given here as with so many existing empty office buildings to finding imaginative new uses to complement the offices.

But the Society warmly welcomes the Paternoster scheme as offering us the most promising, perhaps the only, useful way to proceed. Many of the features are particularly attractive and the scheme as a whole, when completed, will undoubtedly give pleasure to the vast majority of people in the City.

We give below a digest of our comments on other planning applications considered during 1992.

- **21-21A Lime Street, 8-11 Ship Tavern Passage.**

These two groups of buildings are neglected but not beyond conservation to provide the kind of premises this area still requires. The proposed new buildings are out of harmony with their surroundings and in view of the bulk of their rooflines would not enhance the conservation area.

The proposed realignment of the lanes is highly undesirable; the street and footpath lines of the City are an important aspect of its character.

*The application was subsequently withdrawn.*

- **5-8 Bow Churchyard.**

The existing building is undistinguished and its removal is to be welcomed. In principle the proposal for this sensitive site is supported but there is a coarseness about the elevations which needs refining. Some may object to a modern elevation but in our view this architect needs to be encouraged.

- **8 St. Andrew's Hill.**

The design is vaguely classical but has no style at all in the sense of quality. One suspects from the poor quality of the drawings that the detailing would be crude. The bulk and scale are unsatisfactory in relation to neighbouring buildings. The loss of the existing buildings (3-4 storeys, properly designed in the classical idiom) would be most regrettable. The scheme should be rejected.

- **34-35 Furnival Street.**

The existing building is in reasonably good proportion to its neighbours which is important since these are late 17C/early 18C houses. The proposed five-storey and mansard building would be twice the height of the adjoining building; the detailing appears unsuitable; the proposed development would not be particularly desirable anywhere — beside the old houses the effect would be lamentable. *This application was refused.*

- **Empire House, 2-14 St. Martin's Le Grand etc.**

These were proposals for a very large development scheme extending from Gresham Street down to Cheapside.

The developers sought the advice of the Society at an early stage and in the light of our comments on what would have been a single monolithic new building on the site the proposals were radically changed to a series of individual buildings the design of which was given our blessing.

- **1 Princes Street.**

This is a fine but underrated building by Sir Edwin Cooper (the HQ of National Westminster Bank). The proposals to restore the exterior and the "fine rooms" are much welcomed. However, the extent of rebuilding behind the retained facade is excessive. The proposal to rebuild the six upper floors and create huge open-plan offices would result in a distortion of the character of this Grade II listed building.

- **53-57 Carter Lane, 1-5 Addle Hill etc.**

A resubmission of refurbishment proposals. The new elevations for Wardrobe Place are a decided improvement and would enhance this rare courtyard. The Addle Hill elevations still appear unduly mannered. We consider the intended rescue of this enclave to be admirable.

- **The Baltic Exchange, St. Mary Axe.**

This application related to restoration of the areas of the building severely damaged by the terrorist bomb attack in April. The Society welcomed the determination of the Council of the Baltic to commission a speedy restoration and hoped that each phase of the work would be so executed as to mitigate in so far as is possible the loss incurred. We welcomed the assurance that in rebuilding parts of the exchange, the existing heights and profiles would be preserved, that the facade would be rebuilt using salvaged material and that the entrance hall was to be exactly reconstructed.

- **21 Lombard Street.**

The Society while finding the proposals generally acceptable is concerned that once again plot ratio standards are being exceeded. The existing building at 6.15:1 already exceeds our norm and the replacement goes up still higher to 6.5:1.

- **78 Lombard Street, 13-14 Cornhill.**

The ground floor banking hall is an example of high-quality classical architecture of the 1920's and we have doubts about the proposed redevelopment. The realignment of Pope's Head Alley is regrettable although we welcome the proposal for an arcade with seven shops.

- **Daiwa Building**

The Planning Committee approved the application for a replacement building on the corner of London Wall and Wood Street designed by Sir Richard Rogers for the Daiwa Corporation. Disquiet was felt by the Society's Executive Committee at the way this application had been processed by the Planning Committee. We were specially concerned that this application was originally "agreed in principle" making it easier at a later stage to obtain approval despite some undesirable features. The Society hopes that this is a precedent which will not be repeated.

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## CITY HERITAGE AWARD 1992

For the second time in the history of the Award the Assessors felt in 1992 that with a record number of entries of high quality, two were so outstanding to demand that each should receive our accolade.

CITY  
HERITAGE  
AWARD  
1992

The Royal Exchange, dating from 1840, has been magnificently refurbished with a new barrel vault roof over the courtyard and with the skilful addition of two new floors. Earlier additions including unsightly plantroom accretions at roof level have been removed.

**Owners:**

*Grand Gresham Committee and  
Guardian Royal Exchange  
Assurance*

**Developer:**

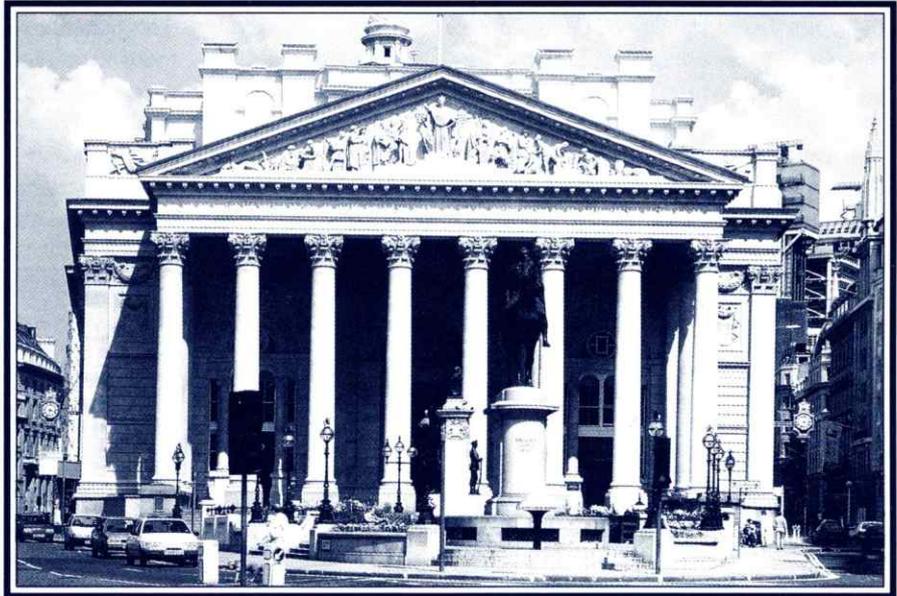
*GRE Properties Limited*

**Architect:**

*Fitzroy Robinson Partnership*

**Contractor:**

*John Laing Construction Ltd*



Royal Exchange  
– joint winner of the 1992 City Heritage Award



Bracken House  
– joint winner of the 1992 City Heritage Award

CITY  
HERITAGE  
AWARD  
1992

Bracken House was built in the 1950's to house the Financial Times. By the 1980's it had become redundant. Architect Michael Hopkins has transformed the building into elegant and flexible modern office premises by preserving the best features of the original and by redeveloping the whole of the central area which formerly accommodated the printing presses.

**Owner/Developer:**

*Obayashi Corporation*

**Architects:**

*Michael Hopkins & Partners Ltd*

**Contractor:**

*Trollope & Colls Construction Ltd*

The Assessors for the 1992 Award which we run jointly with the Worshipful Company of Painter-Stainers were:

Ashley Barker, OBE, FSA, FRIBA

R.C. Houghton, Dip.Arch, RIBA (Painter-Stainers)

P. Wynne Rees, BSc, BArch, BTP, RIBA, (City Planning Officer)

Matthew Saunders, MA, FCA (Ancient Monuments Society)

A.F. Shannon, ARIBA, AADipl (Painter-Stainers)

C. Douglas Woodward, OBE (City Heritage Society)

## THE POULTRY SAGA

**T**he threat of demolition hanging over Mappin and Webb and the other buildings on the famous Poultry site has once again been lifted, at least temporarily, by objections to the road closures that the Palumbo scheme would necessitate.

This latest reprieve arises from the fact that before demolition can take place the developers have to obtain permission to "stop up" the ancient Bucklersbury and Pancras Lanes running through the site.

Such permission has to be given by the Secretary of State for Transport and as soon as the proposal was published objections were made by numerous bodies including the City Corporation, Save Britain's Heritage (which had led the fight against the Palumbo proposals) and our own Society. A further public enquiry into this matter is likely to take place.

## CHANGING ROLE FOR ENGLISH HERITAGE

**A**s has become customary in so many areas of government, English Heritage has proposed a slimming down of its activities. So far as the City is concerned the proposed changes would have the effect of putting greater responsibility on the City Corporation (as with the other London borough councils) for the protection of conservation areas and listed buildings.

In the case of listed buildings English Heritage would still be involved in any matters affecting Grade I or Grade II\* buildings but would leave decisions as to alterations and extensions to ordinary Grade II buildings to the Corporation.

In regard to planning applications affecting unlisted buildings in conservation areas English Heritage propose that their advisory role would in future be limited to applications involving "substantial" demolition. English Heritage is at pains to point out that special safeguards will be preserved to protect against undesirable development but the Society regrets that the role of watchdog first exercised by the GLC's admirable Historic Buildings Division and later taken on by English Heritage's London Division now looks as though it will be lost.

There are two related matters that also cause us concern. The first is a recommendation (emanating from an Audit Commission report) that less important planning applications should no longer be submitted to the City's Conservation Area Advisory Committee. We hope that CAAC will employ special vigilance to ensure that nothing of note escapes its scrutiny.

The second is that in our view too few of the planning applications considered by the City's Planning Committee are these days submitted to the full Court of Common Council for final approval and as we have told the Chairman of the Planning Committee we believe that this lack of involvement weakens the impact of Guildhall decisions on important planning issues.

## BLUE PLAQUES

**W**e are pleased that the City Corporation, in response to pressure from a number of bodies including our own, is to reintroduce the scheme for the installation of commemorative blue plaques to buildings.

This scheme was initiated in the 1920's and there remain today more than 100 plaques in place on buildings. A number were destroyed, with their buildings, during the second world war and others were lost in development works subsequently. It appears that some 30 plaques are in store and we hope that they will shortly be reinstated. It is the intention that a modest programme for producing new plaques will be put in hand.

## EVENTS

As usual the membership were provided with an outstanding series of social occasions by Ann Woodward who, alas, announced at the end of the year that she would be giving up this particular responsibility after providing so much enjoyment for members since we came into being in 1973.

In April we had a visit to Barnard's Inn in Holborn. In May we had a privileged private visit to inspect the historic buildings at Woolwich Arsenal concluding with a dinner in the boardroom at the Museum of London. In July we were on a ride through the City's history at the Tower Pageant.

This year's City Heritage Lecture was delivered in October by one of our own — James — Thomas who with some splendid slides took us on a walk through part of the City to admire (or not) some of the newest City buildings seen against their historical backcloth.

The Annual Dinner, again at the National Liberal Club in December, was voted by all there as its usual great success. Our chief guest and speaker was Stuart Murphy, the former City Architect and currently Master of the Worshipful Company of Chartered Architects with whom we collaborate in presenting our joint award for new architecture.

### Members of the Executive Committee 1992

C. Douglas Woodward, OBE	Chairman
Normal Searle	Vice Chairman
Gordon Rees	Hon. Treasurer
Mrs. Ann Woodward	Membership Secretary & Social Events
David Tettmar	Hon. Secretary
Anthony Hemy	
Tom Wilmot	
James Thomas	Planning applications and CAAC
Desmond Fitzpatrick	Planning applications and CAAC
Peter Duggan	