



CITY HERITAGE SOCIETY

ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1994

A major task for the Society as the City's appointed amenity and conservation body, is to consider all the major planning applications and to submit observations on these to the City's planning officers so that our views can be made known to the Planning and Transportation Committee when the applications are being discussed. Unfortunately in 1993 and again in 1994 we were unable to deal with all the applications. We hope to resume "full service" in 1995.

Meanwhile we note with regret that the City planners in our view tend to be less demanding than they could and should have been in respect of a number of recently approved applications. Refurbishments all too often are approved on the strength of one or more retained façades, with little or no attention being given to interior features some of which are at least of equal importance. This is particularly true in respect of bank conversions. Banking halls and their mezzanine floors can be of special interest and could, with a little more ingenuity on the part of developers, become useful parts of reconstructed buildings.

In regard to new buildings, approval seems all too readily to be given to nondescript designs which are hardly better than the indifferent buildings they are to replace. Surely as the century draws to a close we are far enough away from the utility and austerity of the 1950's and 1960's to expect better of developers and their architects — and more discriminating control from the City planners. It is distressing that lack of quality in the entries submitted for the 1995 New Architecture Award (which is run by the Worshipful Company of Chartered Architects in association with the City Heritage Society) led to the decision not to make an award for new City buildings completed in 1994.

Promise of more housing in the City

One development which the Society positively welcomes is evidence that at long last the City is getting some additional residential accommodation. In recent years we have strongly encouraged more diversification in the use of City floor space with housing as a particularly useful adjunct and alternative to offices.

It is hoped that work will soon start on housing developments in and around Little Britain and in the St. Bartholomew's area. The Society will continue to work

for substantially more housing stock in other parts of the City also.

We also welcome the incorporation into the City (from Islington) of the Golden Lane housing estate following changes by the Boundary Commission. Golden Lane, when built after the last war, was considered a major contribution to urban housing design and received a number of awards.

St. Bartholomew's Hospital

The Hospital of St. Bartholomew is a valued part of our heritage in three respects: First, it is part of Britain's important medical heritage, a place where the sick have come for treatment over the past 800 years and one of the most famous hospitals in the world. Second, it is an historic part of the City's infrastructure, at least as significant to the multi-purpose role of the City as Smithfield meat market, the Old Bailey, or any one of the great financial exchanges. Third, its listed buildings are jewels which have to be retained for their proper purpose.

For all these reasons the Society enthusiastically supports the stance adopted by the City Corporation in 1994 to work in all possible ways for the retention of the Hospital of St. Bartholomew at Smithfield.

The Churches

In January the Templeman Commission set up by the Bishop of London published its report on the future of the City's 39 remaining churches. It recommended that twelve should remain as "active churches" with the other 27 becoming "reserve churches". While none of the 27 are threatened with demolition (they are after all, listed for their architectural excellence) the proposals certainly envisage that some could be locked up and others used for non-church purposes. Repair and maintenance would be reduced to a minimum. Redundancy, for some at least, would seem likely.

Understandably there has been an outcry against these proposals. City Heritage supports the view taken by church leaders, SAVE and others that most if not all the City's churches need to remain in being as places of worship. In the case of a very few it may be possible to find alternative uses if it proved financially impossible to maintain them as churches (but we see little likelihood of livery companies, for example, being willing to undertake the

expense necessary to convert churches into livery halls, particularly when the outcome cannot possibly be as successful as a purpose built hall). Certainly more needs to be done to attract greater numbers of visitors (and thus more income) to all the City's churches and ways found to keep them open (and manned) for longer periods.

In regard to St. Ethelburga, the Society is supportive of moves by the Friends of St. Ethelburga to restore the church and we are pleased to note that a member of our Executive Committee, James Thomas, has been appointed to draw up proposals to this end.

The City Heritage Awards

The City Heritage Lecture in September was presented by the Chairman of the Society on "Seventeen years in the history of the City Heritage Awards". From the beginnings in 1978 which he described as "an eleventh-hour attempt to encourage property developers, architects and builders to think of renewal and refurbishment rather than wholesale destruction and redevelopment" Mr. Woodward traced the course of the awards through the years culminating in the 1994 accolade being given for the refurbishment of the Mansion House.

The Chairman commented: "There can be no doubt that the award which City Heritage and the Worshipful Company of Painter-Stainers instituted in 1978 has been a useful factor in encouraging refurbishment projects. It has provided an opportunity to reward excellence and to indicate the greater cost effectiveness of refurbishment in many instances as compared with redevelopment. It has demonstrated ways in which new building can successfully be integrated with old and ways in which buildings that have become redundant can be given a new lease of life".

The suggestion was made that the content of the Lecture should be used as the basis for a publication commemorating the awards.

The 1994 Award

The City Heritage Award for 1994 was presented to the Corporation of London for its refurbishment of the Mansion House, home of the Lord Mayor since the 1750's and one of London's great buildings. The house was certainly in need of major attention. It was suffering from a damaged roof and various other structural defects as well as being generally shabby with all its building services in need of improvement.

An outstanding feature of the work is the new roof to the saloon with its octagonal central lantern allowing daylight into the centre of the house where previously there was

none and recalling the time when this area was a central courtyard open to the sky.

There was extensive repair of woodwork and plasterwork. Optical fibre lighting was installed above ceiling roses to light the collection of Dutch paintings which are a special feature of the house.

The unanimous verdict of the Assessors: "Work of outstanding excellence; the achievement of a glittering brilliance".

Owner: The Corporation of London

Architects: Department of Building and Services, Corporation of London

Donald W. Insall and Associates Ltd

Contractor: Holloway White Allom Ltd

New Architecture Award

The new Architecture Award is presented by the Worshipful Company of Chartered Architects in association with the City Heritage Society as a means to encourage good building design of today.

The award presented in February 1994 was made to 1 Fleet Place, a strongly modern office structure within the new complex of buildings between Ludgate Hill and Holborn Viaduct. The development benefits not least from imaginative and sensitive treatment of the space between buildings.

Owner: Broadgate Properties plc

Architect: Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, Inc

Contractor: Bovis Construction Ltd

Planning applications commented on by the Society

21, 21a Lime Street and 8, 10, 10a, 11a and 11b Ship Tavern Passage, EC3

Planning consent had been given earlier for this site before it became part of the Leadenhall Market Conservation Area.

The current scheme represents a definite improvement on the previous submission with the main Lime Street facade designed in a manner well established for commercial buildings in the City. We find the design generally commendable up to the second floor level but above that level it seems to gallop away in all directions. We urge serious consideration of these upper levels.

However, it is the site proposals, in that they involve the destruction of the line of Ship Tavern Passage, which the

Society chiefly opposes. This Lane has immemorially provided a footway from Gracechurch Street to Lime Street. Its present dereliction is the result of long-term blight and should not be used as an excuse to destroy an ancient footpath solely for the convenience of developers.

9 - 13 Aldgate High Street

This application is for the demolition and replacement of a 1960's office block between the church of St. Botolph and Aldgate Station. Both are diminished by the existing building and could gain from a sensitive replacement. Unfortunately the proposed replacement cannot be so described, its mass at the highest level greater than the present building, which would diminish even more the steeple of St. Botolph. The unpleasing effect of square windows has rarely been better illustrated.

40 - 53 Threadneedle Street, 1-18 Old Broad Street and land below Fountain Court, EC2

Following City Heritage and other criticism of an earlier scheme for massive redevelopment of this large triangular site at the heart of the City, this revised scheme now retains more than 90 per cent of the existing facades to the main streets. It is very much the "safe option" retaining some noteworthy facades as well as some undistinguished ones. The facades into Adam's Court and Fountain Court are a great improvement on the earlier scheme. The loss of the shopping element is disappointing.

Overall, the scheme shows an interesting and well thought-out approach to fitting a new interior within existing facades but an opportunity has been missed to make a more positive statement at the corner of Threadneedle Street and Old Broad Street and we hope this particular aspect might be reconsidered.

25 Old Broad Street, EC2

An interesting concept for the base of the National Westminster Tower — effectively a glass wedge slotting in underneath the tower. As it stands it seems somewhat incongruous within Old Broad Street but if well detailed could be a worthy addition to the streetscape.

111 - 115 Old Broad Street, EC2

The proposals are a definite improvement on the existing building. The scale and modulation of the facades respects the surrounding buildings and yet the materials contrast with them to good effect.

26 Tudor Street, 20 Whitefriars Street, EC4

Redevelopment of derelict printing works of the 1920's. The proposals retain the existing facades along Tudor Street and Whitefriars Street with a complete new structure behind. The drawings give no sense of modelling within

the elevations and are insufficient to allow a proper assessment. This submission is a good example of how not to present a scheme. We have considerable reservations about the topography of additional floors and plant rooms. These additions are wholly out of keeping with the existing structure. We hope for revision of the proposals.

7 - 11 Bishopsgate

A request for renewal of planning consent granted in 1990. The proposal is for rebuilding behind retained facades and offers decided improvements at roof level where the existing unsuitable attic storey and uneven roof line is to be replaced by attic windows and a mansard roof area which it is hoped will conceal all plant. Part of the ground floor wall is to be removed temporarily and we trust that reinstatement will be carried out to the highest standards and that full use will be made of dismantled stonework; this might be made a condition of the consent.

Shelley House, 3 Noble Street, EC2

Shelley House's disappearance is not a matter of concern. However the proposed replacement would compound the dullness of the area between London Wall and Gresham Street where the opportunity might be taken to improve it. The treatment of the area in and around Monkwell Square comes to mind as a model.

Pepys Street - Savage Gardens - Coopers Row, EC3

The Society considers the proposals well suited to their setting close to listed buildings of importance. More uniformity between the main facades, with the east facade as a model, should be considered.

Augustine House, 6a Austin Friars, EC2

Refurbishment proposal for an unattractive building which promises to achieve an improvement.

Cunard House, 88 Leadenhall Street, EC3

Demolition of a 1930's building the situation of which lends importance to a site which neither the existing nor the proposed replacement take properly into account. The present building is part of whatever character remains in Leadenhall Street and has two neighbours of first-class importance - St. Catherine Cree and Holland House. These, as well as the general character of the area, argue for special treatment of this site. The proposed replacement does not constitute such treatment. We particularly object to the fenestration at third floor level and upwards as being increasingly themeless and repetitive. We would hope that consideration would be given to a sympathetic refurbishment.

7 - 12 Gracechurch Street, EC3

Alterations to the interior behind partially retained facades of a fine example of an interwar years bank. City Heritage welcomes the proposals for refurbishment. However, the Society is doubtful about the increase in height of apparently three-quarters of a storey and apparent enlargement of the top storey which could further deprive St. Michael's churchyard of light. We are also concerned at accretions of plant on the roof. We have seen no reference in the proposals to retention of good interior features of the banking hall.

25 Milk Street, EC2

The existing building would be wholly unnoticeable were it not for its curiously provincial unsuitability to the heart of the City. Its demolition would constitute no loss. The proposed replacement is however of uniform dullness — seven storeys with no theme and no features. The ground floor elevation presents areas of blank stonework making a forbidding aspect to passers-by. The Society would like to see a proposal of greater interest which might serve to encourage better development of this melancholy street.

Problems for retailers

The Society has become increasingly concerned at the number of closures of retail businesses and the number of shop premises standing empty. On the last count out of a total of 1753 shop premises identified in the City, 321 were either empty or under construction. There are fewer new shops now being built than at any period in the last ten years. The tendency is for larger and fewer shops. Prospects for retail trade naturally reduced as the number of people working in City offices decreased during the depressed 1990's.

It is particularly sad that "useful" shops — such as fishmongers, greengrocers, butchers and clothes shops — have been lost. While sandwich bars and cafes are important and provide a valuable service we do not want to have them as our only retail outlets.

Rents in the City tend to be high, bearing in mind that business is largely confined to five days a week and much of that in the middle of the day. The business rate is also high and hopes for substantial reduction in 1995 after revaluation are now not going to materialize.

The Society hopes to devote attention to the problems for retailers and in particular to work for a wider range of shop uses and the attraction back into the City both of "useful" shops as well as shops selling quality merchandise. In this activity we would expect to work in close collaboration with the City of London Retail Traders' Association which performs such a valuable function.

Unitary Development Plan

The City of London Unitary Development Plan was formally adopted by the Corporation in March 1994 thus bringing to an end a lengthy process of formulation and consultation. The Plan provides a framework for all development activity in the City for at least the next ten years. The Society commented on various aspects of the Plan from 1980 onwards.

Events 1994/5

2 March Reception and Annual General Meeting at the City Conference Centre,

9 June "Along the City's Byways" — a walk conducted by Desmond Fitzpatrick among the lanes and side streets around Carter Lane, Watling Street, Bow Lane, College Hill and Dowgate, "seeing remarkable things on the way".

21 July Visits to two of the City's "threatened churches": St. Mary Abchurch and St. Olave, Hart Street, with talks by the two rectors and concluding with refreshments in the church hall of St. Olave's.

14 Sept The Society's Annual Lecture given this year by the Chairman on "Seventeen years in the history of the City Heritage Awards".

10 Nov An evening visit to the newly refurbished Smithfield Meat Market, most splendid of London's great Victorian market buildings, notable for its decorative ironwork, adventurous timber roof and soaring copper-domed towers.

17 Jan. '95 The Annual Dinner of the Society at the recently refurbished St. Bride Institute: Guest Speaker, Ashley Barker.

The Executive Committee 1994/5

C. Douglas Woodward CBE	Chairman
N. Searle	Vice Chairman
G. Rees	Hon. Treasurer and City Heritage Award Secretary
D. Tettmar	Hon. Secretary
Ann Woodward	Membership Secretary
D. Fitzpatrick	} Planning Applications
A. Hemy	
J. Thomas	
R.T.D. Wilmot	
P. Duggan	
Stella Currie	Social events

Desmond Fitzpatrick, James Thomas and Norman Searle are members of the City's Conservation Area Advisory Committee and provide a valuable link between the Society and the Committee.