



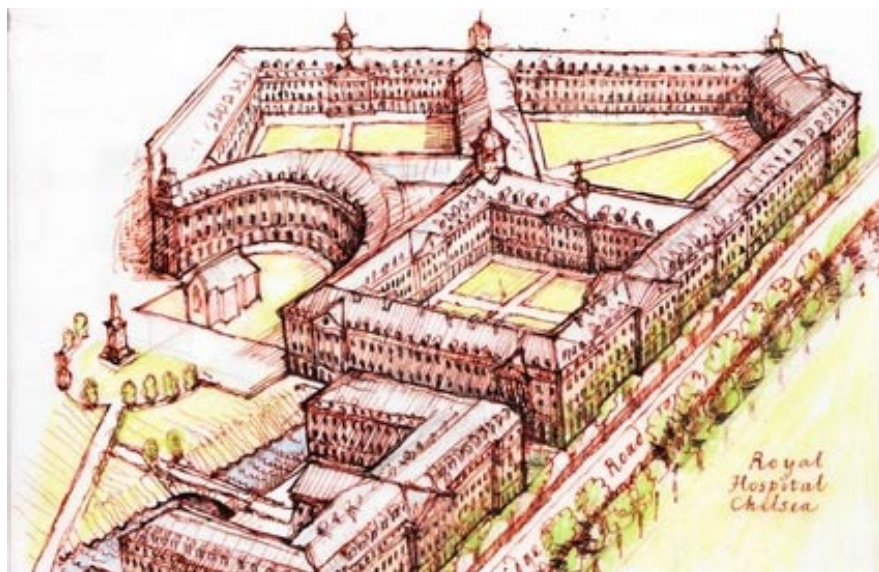
CHELSEA SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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October 2009

The Chelsea Barracks Saga



Part of the Quinlan Terry proposal for Chelsea Barracks

Chairman's Letter

As soon as Westminster City Council began to consult about the redevelopment of the Chelsea Barracks Site, the Society made it clear that it had four priorities – that the former Barracks Chapel should be retained and converted into community use; there should be no tall buildings; there should be affordable housing; and - most important of all – the development should follow the pattern of streets and squares that is traditional in this part of London.

The proposals put forward by Rogers Stirk Harbour did not retain the Chapel and by planning a series of 9-storey blocks 'end-on' to the principal existing thoroughfare, Chelsea Bridge

Road, failed to define that street with buildings, as would be traditional and as the nineteenth century barracks had done.

So, when the Prince of Wales asked Quinlan Terry to produce an alternative sketch master plan which both preserved the chapel and proposed defined streets in the traditional manner we were delighted; though somewhat apprehensive that this excellent plan might be executed entirely in classical design, a hallmark of Mr. Terry's work. The dressing-up of 8-10 storey buildings in classical details has rarely been successful.

As Kenneth Powell said in his review of the Royal Hospital's Margaret Thatcher Infirmary in *Architecture Today*, 'an appro-

prate building on this site, using a palette of brick and stone, could have entirely eschewed literal classical detailing... compared with the work of twentieth-century traditionalists, such as Albert Richardson, McMorran & Whitby, HS Goodhart-Rendel and even Terry's own mentor, Raymond Erith, Terry's architecture seems determinedly resistant to innovation and invention'.

As Caroline Macdonald-Haig reminded the Society on her brilliant guided tour of Holy Trinity Church, J. D. Sedding, its architect, believed that a proper study of past styles was the beginning of good design, not an end in itself.

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The Prince's intervention has had a dramatic effect. The site owners withdrew their application in spite of its being strongly recommended for approval by Westminster's planners.

One can only assume that they will have taken soundings amongst Councillors and come to the conclusion that, having seen the scheme promoted by the Prince, they were likely to go against the advice of their officers.

The owners' subsequent actions appear to be even more bizarre – they have decided to ask no fewer than ten teams of architects and planners to prepare plans for the site.

Quinlan Terry is not one of the ten and the only firm that would remotely be approved of by the Prince of Wales is that of Demetri Porphyrios, who some years ago designed a neo-classical house in the south-west corner of Chelsea Square.

Amongst the firms on the list

is Terry Farrell and Partners, the architects of the tall towers proposed for Lots Road Power Station, and many of the firms are ones whose track record is frankly far inferior to that of Rogers Stirk Harbour.

It is anticipated that the list will be reduced to three firms who will work together and a whole new process of public consultation will commence; yet the owner's agents say a new application will be ready by Spring next year – by any standards an impossible time-scale. This is surely not the outcome that the Prince had in mind.

In all this talk about design, important though it is, we should not lose sight of the opportunity the Chelsea Barracks site provides for a large number of affordable housing units and we are determined to ensure that this urgent need is not sacrificed when new proposals eventually emerge.

David Le Lay

Chelsea Society consulted by Project Blue

The Society has recently been consulted by Project Blue (aka Candy and Candy) about our views on what should happen on the Chelsea Barracks site.

The Society's response makes clear that the key principles should be:

- a traditional, street-based approach, although the architecture could be modern or traditional in style;
- permeable, with routes through the site, not a gated community;
- the creation of an axis through the site from Chelsea Bridge Road to Ranelagh Grove; and
- the retention of the Chapel.

Michael Bach

PLANNING REPORT

The New Borough Plan

You need to be an anorak to enjoy reading the new Kensington & Chelsea plan but, it has to be acknowledged, sooner or later it will affect most of us. So what in the latest draft is different from before?

• Public Realm

One change concerns the look of streets and parks – the 'public realm' as planners call it. Following the plaudits rained on the Council for de-cluttering and improving the look of Kensington High Street, the plan contains a

'vision' (visions crop up a lot in the 'new' planning) for making many bits of the Borough look better.

So watch out for more high-quality paving and shiny new street lights; expect more, probably abstract, street-corner sculpture; prepare to say good-bye to more 1960s one-way traffic schemes – maybe even the monster that bisects Earl's Court; and, in the case of large developments, be it the rebuilding of Council housing estates or Chelsea Barracks, expect to walk comfortably through old-fashioned streets fronted by flats and houses rather than peering nervously at blocks or slabs

set in amorphous tracts of wind-blasted space.

• "Brompton Cross"

One public realm suggestion made by the Society concerns what estate agents call Brompton Cross – the cluster of shops and streets around the Michelin building. Here too the Council wants to make the place more memorable and, as its contribution, the Society proposes a landmark – 'paid for by developer contributions'. (This could become possible when Elden House – above the Joseph shop - is rebuilt.) This landmark, which

could be the size of the obelisk at Seven Dials, would be at the junction of Fulham Road, Sloane Avenue and Pelham Street and visible from all directions. It could also be a totem pole, a skinny Michelin man or a holograph twenty feet in the air. Whether this idea survives remains to be seen. Only one thing is clear, if a landmark is created, it should surely be, in some form or other, a cross.

• Tall Buildings

One worrying aspect of the new plan is its approach to tall buildings. Some earlier ideas for landmark towers on the Fulham-Chelsea boundary have, thank goodness, fallen foul of Councillors' wrath or the editor's blue pencil, but what remains is a favourable attitude to 'proposals that are more than 1.5 times the height of the predominant context, except where the proposal is 2 to 3 times the height of the predominant context, and not above 45 metres...'. Planning anoraks may be able to decipher this formula but it flummoxed the Society. Our proposal is for something less obscure that would put very severe constraints on new buildings taller than those that make up most of the Chelsea we know and love!

Finally, the plan does cover the vexed question of basement excavations. Those hoping to open up a quick route to Australia under their houses are advised that the Council will 'permit subterranean extensions only where....the amenity of the adjoining properties is not harmed.' The Concise Oxford defines amenity as 'Pleasantness (of places etc)'. It looks like work for lawyers.

Lots Road Power Station

Demolition continues apace at the old London Underground power station and the latest structures to fall to the breakers are the fuel tanks that used to occupy a huge concrete bunker on the Fulham side of Chelsea Creek. (As recently as the 1980s the warning hoots of tankers, as they turned into the Creek, used to be audible from the Brompton Cemetery and even further into Kensington.)

Concern has been expressed that Hutchinson Whampoa, the Hong Kong-based developers, having taken the roof off the turbine hall, will now let the place rot until, like Battersea power station, it becomes a hopeless case. This seems unduly pessimistic given that the huge volume of the hall, destined to be a Milan-like galleria flanked by many levels of flats, will be one of the development's attractions and an important contributor to the total of 450 dwellings.

Mike Stowell, director for Terry Farrell and Partners, architects, said that, following demolition, construction would begin on the £500 million scheme. 'We are currently preparing information for tender for the Fulham side of the site,' he said. This will be for a thirty-storey skyscraper, two blocks of private flats and the first of an eventual 368 affordable homes.

Chelsea in the economic recession

The number of applications for development has shrunk this year – presumably because money is tight. Lots of small-scale works by residents are still coming through, but big schemes are fewer than usual. Work is still,

however, going on. Lots Road has been mentioned, but other projects in progress include the flats being built in the old Sloane School, and in a new building, at the corner of Hortensia and Fulham Roads. The architects, Dixon Jones, have to their credit the modernisation of the Royal Opera House in Covent Garden, including the conversion of the Floral Hall into the opposite of a crush bar. They are also architects for the repaving of Exhibition Road as an experimental shared surface.

In the King's Road, the Sloane Stanley Estate has completed the shops and offices just to the west of Beaufort Street. The somewhat heavy neo-Arts & Crafts façades are the work of Paul Davis. In the heart of Chelsea, Squire & Partners, are still negotiating with the Town Hall over a replacement for Alameda House, 90-100 Sydney Street. The site sits between an office in corned-beef coloured brick, and the pretty row of early 19th century houses that run up to The Peer pub formerly the Wellesley Arms.

Plastic sheeting all over the Antiquarius building declares that, with the sad departure of the antiques traders, it is being turned into the London "flagship store" of Anthropologie, a New York "apparel, home and found" shop. At the other side of the Old Town Hall, all is quiet at Chenil House, as it is down at the Clearings in Danvers Street and the Power House in Alpha Place. Some developers seem to have run out of power.

Terence Bendixson

The New Borough Plan - 2

The Good News

The Society has been pressing the Council for over five years to develop a new policy to control the commercial use of our open spaces, such as Royal Hospital South Grounds and Ranelagh Gardens, Burton's Court, the Duke of York's HQ. Two years ago we thought we had convinced the Council, but it was only after a meeting last year where we spelt out the impact of the cumulative effect of successive events, that the Council realised that the new plan – the LDF – needed to include a clear policy. The latest version of the LDF – policy CR3(d) – at last sets out how the Council will treat any proposals. Now we need to make sure that it is implemented.

The Bad News

The new plan is designed to focus on places. From a Chelsea perspective, our main “place” is the Thames. The current plan – the London Plan and the UDP – recognise the strategic importance of the Thames to London and to Chelsea, explicitly seeks to preserve and enhance the views and vistas along and across the Thames, ensure that any development respects the setting and designates a special Thames Policy Area. The LDF barely recognises the existence let alone the strategic importance of the Thames, its views and vistas and its sensitivity to unsympathetic developments on both sides of the river. The London Plan makes much of the “Blue



Views of the Chelsea Riverside are not protected in the LDF

Ribbon Network”, but does not recognise any “strategic views” – it expects the Borough to recognise and protect them. The policies in the UDP covering the Chelsea Riverside and the Royal Hospital seem to be airbrushed out of our new plan.

Michael Bach

NEWS

Chelsea Academy Opens

The new £40m Chelsea Academy opened for business on 7 September – the first new secondary school in the Borough since Holland Park School opened in 1958, albeit still in temporary accommodation in Hortensia Road. The school will move to its new Lots Road campus next year. The new school will grow from the 162 pupils who started this year to its target of 1,060. It has been a long time coming – it is a landmark for Chelsea.

Departure of David Prout

David Prout, Executive Director of Planning and Borough Development, left the Council on 18 September to return to the Department of Communities and Local Government on his

promotion to Director General, Communities.

David Prout has been responsible for overhauling the handling of planning applications, introducing briefing meetings for the Major Planning Development



David Prout

Committee on major applications, steering through a number of controversial planning applications, and overseeing the development of the new development plan – Local Development Framework.

A new Interim Executive Director has been appointed – Peter Lerner a former Director of Planning and Chief Executive at St Albans City Council. Interviews for the new Executive Director will take place in late October and it is expected that the new person will arrive by mid-February 2010.

Imperial Wharf Station opens at last

Three trains an hour in both directions will begin to serve the Imperial Wharf Station, when the new station opens

on 27 September. Services on the West London 'Overground' Line will go south to Clapham Junction and north to Willesden Junction, via West Brompton, Olympia and Shepherd's Bush. Shoppers for the new Westfield London Shopping Centre should alight at Shepherd's Bush. The new station should bring Lots Road, Chelsea Harbour and Sands End a little closer to the rest of London.

Alpha Place

Alpha Place is now a vacant site and on the market after the property company that secured the planning permission was taken over and the new owner went into receivership. The receiver is now trying to sell the site. An anonymous property expert has suggested that the site could sell for as much as

£75 million, but because of the scarcity value of such sites in Chelsea, the receivers sound confident that they will get a good price. The planning consent expires next March, and it is highly likely that a new owner would want to renegotiate the planning deal. If you are interested contact Simon Davidson of Allsop (the receivers) or Gary Hershman of Beauchamp Estates!

Boris's Bikes

The Mayor of London's plans for bicycle hire stations are taking shape. The Town Hall has received planning applications for the following eleven 'docking stations':

- Seville Street next to Harvey Nichols
- Harriet Street next to Lowndes Square

- Sydney Street close to St Luke's Church
- Pont Street west of Sloane Street
- Sloane Avenue near the Michelin Building
- Denyer Street by the Council Depot
- Cadogan Place at the south end of Cadogan Square
- Chelsea Green
- Sloane Gardens near Sloane Square Underground Station
- Flood Street near the King's Road
- On the pavement of Royal Avenue next to the King's Road

Every station will have between 25 and 35 bikes that can be hired (for a tariff yet to be published) by clocking in and paying at a device somewhat like a cash point. It has to be said that the



A typical bicycle docking station

“docking stations” with their rows of bikes are not things of beauty and it is ironic that, at a time when the Borough Council is trying to reduce street clutter, a new source of it should arise.

Will a combination of both Boris’s bikes and club cars for hire - plus buses, trains and taxis prompt a measurable reduction in the Borough’s already low level of car ownership and use? No one knows. Might the answer to the question depend on what happens to fuel prices and to rising awareness of the perils of climate change?

Terence Bendixson

Lighter Lights

The ‘candelabra’ lights on Battersea Bridge are to be given a new lease of life by Transport for London.

The existing columns and three-armed lamp-holders are to be dismantled, repaired, shot-blasted and repainted. New lanterns, copies of the existing ones, will reduce upward glare and glow from their frosted domes while greatly increasing the light on the deck of the bridge.

Electricity use will be cut by half. Approval is being sought from English Heritage (Battersea Bridge is listed), Wandsworth and the Borough Council. David O’Keefe, Senior Engineer at WSP Civils is in charge.

Transport Projects for 2010/11 and 2011/12:

Following a successful bid for funds from the Mayor of London, the Council is expecting the Borough’s allocation to rise from £3.7m this year to £5.2m in 2010/11. Among the schemes the Council wants funded in the next 2 years are:

Chelsea & Westminster Hospital:

streetscape improvements in Fulham Road – removal of clutter along the hospital frontage, repaving, redesign of the lay-by, new cycle parking facilities in the basement car park, pavement widening and widening of existing pelican crossings [This was first proposed by the Society over 5 years ago].

King’s Road Pedestrian Crossings:

- by Sloane Square: replace

staggered crossing with a straight across one,

- Old Church Street junction: replace staggered crossing with a straight across one. [As proposed by the Society in ten years ago].

King’s Road:

Rationalisation of signs and removal of clutter [reported in last issue].

Pont Street, Walton Street & Beauchamp Place:

Install pedestrian phases on all arms of the junction.



The Battersea Bridge lights

EVENTS

CHELSEA ARTS FESTIVAL: 13-24 June 2009



Against pretty awful odds and a pretty shaky financial environment, the Chelsea Arts Festival duly had its debut in the sun back in June with 30+ events taking place in a dozen venues across Chelsea, not to mention a number of walks and studio openings all with the aim of living up to the new festival's slogan '*In Chelsea, for Chelsea, celebrating Chelsea*'. Undoubted highlights were the magnificent baritone, Sir Willard White's final concert at the Cadogan Hall in which he celebrated the life and musical legacy of the great Paul Robeson and the fourth and final work 'Seven Ages' commissioned from writer Vikram Seth and composer Alec Roth.

Taking over from where the Chelsea Festival had left off, chelsea:artsfestival intends to build on the initial success of this first year, and by all accounts the event is destined to take on a much more distinctive hue. "The fact that we managed to mount a festival at all in 2009 was fairly remarkable" admits Festival Director Stewart Collins, "and I have to say I am hugely indebted

to the central group of supporters that enabled it to take place, but I think we are all agreed that the future success of the event depends on building support not only within Chelsea but also further afield, and for that we are looking at a number of options that will give the festival an absolute USP. Times will doubtless remain challenging for the foreseeable future, but having got to first base, we are determined to progress and to build something distinctive, relevant – and above all exciting.

DOGGETT'S COAT AND BADGE RACE:

This year's race was on Friday 10 July – a glorious summer day. There was a record turnout of spectators, probably due to the fact that not only did the Society hold a lunch party after the race, but so too did George Nicholson, one of our members who lives on Chelsea Embankment. There was a full complement of six rowers, each of whom was presented with



The Mayor and the winner a bottle of fine champagne by the Mayor of the Royal Borough but there was a special cheer for the winner, in the blue strip – Tom Metcalf. The runners-up were Dean Pettipher, Jack Deverell, Thomas Gadd, Aaron Wynn and Guy Rutland.

After the race some 50 members of the Society repaired to the delightful studio of the London Sketch Club in Dilke Street, which was bedecked with flowers and model boats, for a suitably summery luncheon.



The Mayor at the Society's lunch

The Society's special guests were the Mayor and Mayoress, Councillor and Mrs. Timothy Coleridge. So enjoyable was the occasion that, although there were no speeches, the Mayor felt moved to say a few words of thanks and appreciation at the end of the meal.

David Le Lay

AUTUMN LECTURE

This year's Annual Lecture will be given by Tom Martin. Tom was born in Chelsea and is now running a huge property portfolio built up by his father over the last 60 years.

Virtually all this property is in Chelsea, including several blocks of the King's Road.

Tom will give his views about Chelsea and what he thinks its future will be. As a large property owner he is in a position to shape the future.

The talk will be held in the Small Hall of Chelsea Old Town Hall, King's Road, London SW3 on Monday 12th October at 6:30pm and it will last one hour.

CHELSEA SOCIETY AGM

The Annual General Meeting of the Chelsea Society will be held at Chelsea Town Hall on Monday 23rd November commencing at 6:30pm.

This meeting is open to Members only.

To join the Chelsea Society you can download a Membership Application Form and Banker's Order Form from the Chelsea Society website at:

www.chelseasociety.org.uk

or collect an application form from the Chelsea Library.

REVIEW

The Stories behind the Blue Plaques



In 1996 the Society's Chelsea Festival Exhibition "Who Lived Here?" was about Blue Plaques in Chelsea, but like almost all our exhibitions it was ephemeral – nothing remains of the hard work that went into the research and presentation.

Since then there have been a number of Blue Plaque guides telling you where the famous lived in London. Now, at last, the ultimate guide has appeared – a beautiful, glossy coffee-table book has been published "Lived in London: Blue Plaques and the Stories Behind Them", edited by Emily Cole for English Heritage (Yale University Press, June 2009 £40).

Chelsea, quite rightly, warrants a whole chapter of its own with its 43 plaques. By area, it tells the life of each subject, their achievements and how they came to live here. Cheyne Walk alone, if you did not know already, has 10 plaques, with another concentration in Tite Street.

It is a slice of Chelsea's history – however well you know the area, it is unlikely that you will have seen all these plaques and the number is still growing. And

even if you have seen them, they only give you the bare facts. You now have the stories behind the plaques.

The book is very well researched – drawing on the records of English Heritage and the Royal Borough – it is succinctly written and beautifully illustrated. An English Heritage researcher wrote the text for each area and, very fittingly, the Chelsea section is by the editor herself, Emily Cole. It would make a perfect Christmas present.

Michael Bach

KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH YOU

We want to be able to communicate with you by email. If you have access to email, please send it to:

honsecretary@chelseasociety.org.uk

simply stating "this is my address" and giving your name.

Our website is at:

www.chelseasociety.org.uk

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