

The Imperial Institute



OPENING OF THE IMPERIAL INSTITUTE: APPROACH OF THE ROYAL PROCESSION.

Early successes of the Society included the retention of the then derelict Tower House in Melbury Road (a magnificent example of William Burges at his medieval and domestic best), the retention by the Royal Borough of the war-damaged Leighton House, and the retention of the east wing of Holland House and of the Orangery in Holland Park. The Society also lobbied for a Preservation Order on the Dissenters' Chapel in Kensal Green Cemetery, thus making its restoration

possible in the late 1990s.

But the major early battle was fought in 1956 over the impressive bulk of the Imperial Institute, off Exhibition Road. It lay just outside the borders of Kensington, but was deemed by the Society to be of commanding local and national importance. Built 'in the Renaissance manner' on 2 acres (.80h) of land as a national memorial to Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee of 1887 to the designs of Thomas Colcutt, it had enjoyed a magnificent State opening in 1893.

Seen some 60 years later by the developers as an anachronism with an inconvenient interior and as 'a hindrance to the full development of the site', its demolition met stinging opposition from the Society. A meeting organised by Mrs Christiansen in the Old Town Hall gathered some 600 residents, and stern representation from the Royal Borough to the LCC that its destruction would be a disaster.

Swayed by an outburst of public opinion and a furious Press campaign, Government conceded much reduced density for the site and retention of the handsome 280 feet (85.5m) high campanile as a London landmark. Subsequently, the Imperial Institute site transmuted into Imperial College, and the Imperial Institute itself transmuted into the Commonwealth Institute in