

LONDON TOPOGRAPHICAL NEWS

The newsletter of the London Topographical Society

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HONORARY TREASURER

At the Annual General Meeting this year our Honorary Treasurer for the last ten years, Anthony Cooper, told us that he did not wish to continue in that office beyond the end of the year, and appealed for a successor to come forward. Since no-one has responded yet this appeal is addressed to the membership at large.

The Honorary Treasurer performs the vital task of keeping our books in order, with the receipt and payment of cheques, but does *not* need to be an accountant or bank manager; Anthony Cooper himself is an architect, his predecessor, Miss Honeybourne, was a school teacher. Membership records and the chasing of subscriptions are in the hands of our Membership Secretary, and the invoices for sales of publications are done by the Publications Secretary, so the Treasurer does not have to deal with these matters. There are three meetings of the Society's council each year, in addition to the Annual General Meeting, to which the Treasurer reports on the state of finance. Anthony Cooper would be very pleased to tell any aspirant what the job involves; his telephone number is 01-722 7063.

Who will help the Society in this most important job?

A-Z OF REGENCY LONDON

We must apologise to members for the long gestation of this book, which has still not been published in spite of the optimistic statement in the last Newsletter. However, like the two previous and very successful volumes, *The A to Z of Regency London* is a joint publication with the Guildhall Library and Harry Margary, and so is not under our direct control. Some of the delay is simply due to the sheer size of the index — about 6,500 individual entries for all the streets, lanes, courts, churches etc on the map. There have also been some printing problems, but things look rather brighter now and it is hoped that it will be published before next Easter.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

In the last Newsletter we suggested that it was time to consider raising the annual subscription and we asked for members' comments. I would like to thank everyone who took the trouble to send in their views about the appropriate level of subscription. There was a very good response and, with one or two exceptions, opinion came down heavily in favour of an early increase to £10.

Those who attended the Annual General Meeting will know that we discussed the question at some length. As well as covering the amount and date of any increase, we considered whether there should be reduced rates for students and pensioners and whether we should introduce a life membership. In the end, the meeting clearly favoured an increase to £10 per annum, effective from January 1986, with no reduced rates or life membership.

Patrick Frazer

STANDING ORDERS

The Membership Secretary would be delighted if more members would pay their subscriptions by standing order. Payment by standing order is the best way of making sure that the Society gets your subscription when it is due, which is 1st January each year. Those members who have to be reminded cause extra work and aggravation, as well as costing the Society money in terms of lost interest. You can arrange a standing order directly with your bank — our bank account is at Midland Bank, Camden Town

branch, sorting code number 40-02-03, account number 51021001. Alternatively, you can get a form to complete from Trevor Ford, 59 Gladesmore Road, South Tottenham, London N15 6TA.

COVENANTS

Will members who find a buff Inland Revenue form enclosed kindly fill it in and return it to me. This has to be done at the start of a covenant and not every year.

Anthony Cooper

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A SQUARE IN THE HEART OF THE CITY?

Earlier this year controversy raged at a public inquiry over the creation of a new square west of the Mansion House, associated with the building of a tower block and underground shopping concourse, all to the designs of Mies van der Rohe in the 1960s. Precedents were cited, either on the ground, in the form of the Stocks or Woolchurch Market, from the Great Fire till 1737 on land now occupied by the Mansion House, or in unfulfilled plans.

Most people are familiar with the plans of Wren and his contemporaries for rebuilding the City after the Fire, with a new layout, broad streets and squares. One of these last would have been somewhere near the site of the Mansion House. John Gwynn, writing in the eighteenth century only a few years after the Mansion House had been built, would have liked to form a large square with an obelisk in front of the Mansion House, that is, to the north, though he recognised that there was little hope of executing such a plan.¹ He would, however, have preferred the space between Bucklersbury and Poultry to have been cleared, roughly as is now proposed, with the Mansion House built directly facing Cheapside.

Perhaps less familiar is the report presented by Holden and Holford in 1947 to the Corporation on proposals for reconstruction in the City, which included in its long-term plan a proposal to create a large square between Poultry and Cornhill;² this would have occupied the site of the Mansion House and land to the east.

Least known of all must surely be a vigorous and passionate plea by William Frederick Rock, published in 1869, when Queen Victoria Street was being constructed, to leave

open the triangle of land now occupied by the National Safe Deposit vaults and the Bank of New Zealand next to the Mansion House.³ This pamphlet of 16 pages and a sketch map is full of indignation at the philistine and mercenary attitude of the Metropolitan Board of Works which planned to build on the site, when in a few years' time, according to Rock, much of the site would be required for widening Walbrook to 60 feet and would have to be acquired at great expense. He launched an attack on rebuilding Bucklersbury only 18 feet wide within a few yards of the Mansion House, contrasting it with the space given to show the beautiful façade of the Bank and the Royal Exchange: 'We have nothing to do but to avoid rebuilding deformities and obstructions: we are scarcely called upon actively to do what is right, we have only to avoid what is wrong.'

'The public loves beauty too well to grudge what is necessary to secure it in their at last improving city.' The space, he says, is worth preserving: 'It has been remarked that it will only open up the western front of the Mansion House, which, it is said, is not very beautiful. Humph! Who are the judges? Beauty, civic architectural beauty especially, does not abound, and we must decide as the present specimens go; and what have we, the citizens of London got, which greatly excels Dance's respectable building? We are at present too bare of beauty, to build lanes to hide even modest pretensions to it.'

'At all events the present Board of Works must be watched. They must not rebuild lanes like Bucklersbury, or replace obstructions to traffic. They must not cover up a newly discovered beauty like the Church of St. Mary Aldermary.' 'The Board of Works must go further to meet the necessities of the age, which call forth adoption of every possible combination of beauty with utility, or public opinion must control them before the present opportunities of improving our City are lost. On the whole', he concludes, 'it seems desirable to form some VIGILANCE SOCIETY to watch the Board of Works.' Perhaps the Victorian Society or the City Heritage Society is the sort of thing he had in mind.

Whether, this time, there will be a new square remains to be seen.

1 *London and Westminster Improved*, by John Gwynn (London 1766; reprinted by Gregg International Publishers Ltd, 1969), pp. 101-2 and plate 3.

2 *The City of London, A record of destruction and survival*, by C H Holden and W G Holford (London: The Architectural Press, 1951), p. 64.

3 *No Rebuilding Lanes in the City: An Appeal for Open Space in London, and against the threatened Rebuilding of Bucklersbury*, by William Frederick Rock (London 1869; copy in the Guildhall Library).

LONDON'S BUILDING

The Building of London from the Conquest to the Great Fire, by John Schofield. A Colonnade Book published by British Museum Publications Ltd in association with The Museum of London, 1984. x + 190 pages, copious illustrations, 4to. £12.95.

I suspect that all London enthusiasts carry in their heads a short list of essential reading on the subject of their beloved city. John Schofield's new book is an essential addition to that bibliography. A sentence in the *Postscript* sums up the purpose of the volume: 'We have, in part, been composing a guide to a city that no longer exists.'

Drawing on surviving buildings, on past and recent

archaeological evidence, on administrative and judicial records, on City Company archives, and on maps, surveys — especially those of Ralph Treswell — bird's-eye views and water-colours, many of them made by eighteenth-century antiquaries on the eve of demolition, he presents us with an astonishingly detailed survey of the capital's development over six centuries, a development that was almost completely swept away in the Fire of 1666.

Proper attention is given to the public buildings but Mr Schofield also provides scrupulously precise evidence for the plans and probable appearance of much humbler dwellings. To scholarship, he adds sympathy, enthusiasm and an historical imagination that re-peoples the long-vanished streets.

The book is particularly to be commended for the variety of illustrations used, and for the excellence of the layout. The price — £12.95 — is modest as prices go to-day and is excellent value. Add this book to your Christmas list, or use your book-tokens for it!

Ann Saunders

NOTES AND QUERIES

The newsletter is issued twice a year. Space is available for you to ask questions relating to London topography or to communicate items of interest to members or information about research in progress. We would also like to print the result of enquiries. Please write to Stephen Marks at the address given below.

STREET MARKET AT UPTON

Mr C Wiseman (Lytton Lodge, The Drive, Snaresbrook, London E18 2BL) is preparing a history of the street market at Queens Road, Upton Park, London E13, from about the turn of the century to the present time, and would be grateful to hear from anyone who has any special information, documents, literature or photographs which might be of interest.

LONDON TOPOGRAPHICAL RECORD VII AN ASSOCIATION COPY

A few years ago I was fortunate to find a copy of volume VII of the *Record* which is interesting for its associations. It contains the bookplate of Henry B Wheatley, who was one of the founding members of the Topographical Society of London in 1880 and its moving spirit. It shows him seated at a pedestal desk in his library, with a large curved bay window fringed with draperies beyond him and his high book-cases topped with busts; above him hangs a triple rising gasolier with counterweights.

The bookplate is signed and dated 'J P Emslie 1889'. Emslie was a prolific draughtsman of the London scene and did various work for the Topographical Society of London and the London Topographical Society including the three series of *Illustrated Topographical Record of London*, published in 1898-1900, a sort of predecessor of our present *Record*.

In addition, there is a pencil note, 'Edited by H B W', in Wheatley's own hand, giving explicit information not available in the volume nor, as far as I have been able to find, elsewhere.

Stephen Marks

Edited by Stephen Marks, Hamilton's, Kilmersdon, near Bath, Somerset, and issued by Patrick Frazer, Hon Secretary of the London Topographical Society, 36 Old Deer Park Gardens, Richmond, Surrey.