

THE WESTMINSTER SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER

URBAN VITALITY AND CONGENIALITY

April 2010

WESTMINSTER SOCIETY AGM 2010

The Society's 2010 AGM, reception and Annual Lecture will take place on Monday 10 May in the Banqueting Room at 45 Millbank, formerly the Regimental Mess of the Royal Army Medical College. (The Grade II listed college buildings are now one of the campuses of the University of the Arts, London.) Our Annual Lecture will be given by Timothy Jones from English Heritage. His topic will be: London's Clubland – its evolution, change and adaptation.

The reception will begin at 6.00 pm and the AGM at 6.45 pm.

The formal notice of the AGM together with an Agenda and an application form have already been sent out. If you would like to attend the reception please return your application form with a cheque for £10 to the Chairman, Olwen Rowlands, 19 Regency Street, London SW1P 4BY by Monday 3 May at the latest.

WE HAVE A NEW HONORARY SECRETARY

Antony Hurst, who for ten years has been Chairman of the Hugh Street Society, has kindly agreed to take over from Peter Handley as the Westminster Society's Honorary Secretary. Antony is a former career civil servant who retired in 1993. He has lived in Hugh Street in Pimlico for 45 years. A widower, he has two daughters and five grandchildren. He is also an ordained Church of England clergyman, though always non-stipendiary, and is now licensed at St Martin-in-the Fields. He has written plays, novels, theology books, and local histories—notably of Pimlico and of the Diocese of Southwark. His most recent work, a history of Soho, will be published later this year.

UNSUITABLE MEMORIAL FOR BOMBER COMMAND

An application to create a memorial to the men of Bomber Command has been submitted to Westminster's Planning Department. The design for the memorial includes a classical screen of Portland Stone with at its centre a bronze sculpture of a seven-man bomber crew looking up at the sky through an opening in the roof. The memorial has been designed by Liam O'Connor who created the Armed Forces

Memorial in the National Memorial Arboretum at Litchfield in Staffordshire and also the Commonwealth Memorial Gates on Constitution Hill.

If completed, the memorial would cost £3 million. £1.5 million has already been raised from contributions from Daily Telegraph readers and a donation from the Heritage Foundation, which raises money for memorials to commemorate British achievers.

Liam O'Connor's design takes the form it does partly because the brief he was given required a new gateway to The Green Park. In realizing it, he chooses to refer to the Decimus Burton screen at Hyde Park Corner. In our opinion his design fails on both counts: the overstated gateway leads to nothing more than a narrow strip of pavement within the park leading to the Hyde Park Corner underpass. It isn't good historical neoclassicism, and it's overblown in context.

But the problem is more serious than that. We take particular exception to the proposed work for its tunnel vision that only envisages a circumscribed monument to Bomber Command. While over 55,000 men died carrying out bombing raids over Germany during World War II, a memorial that entirely ignores the hundreds of thousands of civilians who lost their lives as a result of the Command's missions (and the devastation of cities like Hamburg and Dresden) seems to us—and we are sure would seem to multitudes of future visitors—callous, uncivilised and entirely unsuitable.

The Society is not opposed to there being a memorial to Bomber Command of an appropriate kind. In our response to the planning application we suggested that a memorial might be better sited at Hyde Park Corner, where there are several war memorials, or nearer to Green Park Station. It could also be argued that such a memorial belongs out of London on the site of one of the East Anglian airfields from which Bomber Command operated. Wherever it is located, we believe that it must set the sacrifice of the men of Bomber Command alongside the bitter reasons and tragic consequences of their missions.

190 STRAND'S UNNECESSARY PARKING PROVISION

In our January Newsletter we told you about a development at 190 Strand to which we planned to make no objection. To be more precise, we planned to make no objection to the building. When we responded to the March planning application we suggested that a one-for one parking provision was unreasonable in a location such as 190 Strand with its excellent access to public transport, and it seemed to fly in the face of the objective of reducing car use in central London and encouraging residents to use buses and the Underground.

Similarly lavish parking provision was offered to those moving into apartments at Grosvenor Waterside, but very few people were interested in buying it. Perhaps it's time the City Council acted more consistently to discourage car ownership in central London.

TIRED
STRUCTURES AT
VICTORIA
STATION FOR
BYGONE VISITORS
OF STATE TO BE
TACTFULLY
REMOVED

An application was submitted recently to return a forgotten part of Victoria Station to its earlier, more illustrious, condition.

Members with long memories will recall the days when state visits to the Court of St James began with the royal train arriving at Platform 2, where the visiting head of state received a formal welcome followed by a drive in an open carriage from Hudson's Place to Buckingham Palace. In time, foreign dignitaries arrived by air and were welcomed at Heathrow, but for many years after that, Platform 2 continued to retain the structures from which drapes were suspended when they arrived by train, and a steel and acrylic canopy to shelter dignitaries and red carpets that had been built almost the length of the station façade.

Network Rail proposes to remove this structure in Hudson's Place, restore the façade and install new lighting. The restored façade will not be an exact reconstruction, but it's certain to be a great improvement over what's there now. The Society supports this proposal.

ELEPHANTS AT
LARGE IN
CENTRAL LONDON

From the beginning of May until the middle of July we will see a large number of colourfully decorated life-size models of baby elephants displayed across central London. The Elephant Parade is an innovative fundraising and public awareness campaign that highlights the plight of the Asian elephant, currently facing extinction. By mid-March the Society's views had been sought on applications to erect over 40 models in Westminster: 1 at Cockspur Street; 6 at Charing Cross; 2 near Cleopatra's Needle; 2 in St George's Square; 2 in St James's Square; 2 in Whitehall Gardens; 4 in Leicester Square; 5 in Aldwych; 7 in Victoria Embankment Gardens and 14 in St James's Park.

Each elephant has been decorated by a different artist or, um, "celebrity." At the end of the campaign the elephants will be auctioned by professional auctioneers. A large part of the proceeds of the auctions will be donated to organizations working to preserve the Asian elephant. The Society raised no objection to the temporary installation of these models.

TEMPORARY LIFTS AT DUKE OF YORK'S STEPS

We recently received an application for the installation of three temporary water- and solar-powered wheelchair lifts at the Duke of York's steps between the Mall and Waterloo Place. The lifts are part of the London Festival of Architecture, taking place from June 19 to July 4, and will enable wheelchair users to access the so-called Nash Ramblas from Lower Regent Street to Regent's Park, one of the focal points of the Festival. The lifts are designed to go in the centre of the steps with one at ground level and one on each of the landings.

While we support the idea of permanent wheelchair access between Waterloo Place and the Mall, the Society objected to this scheme. We disliked the way the lifts obscured the view from the Mall of the Duke of York's column, and recommended that they be mounted to one side of the steps. (It was apparently felt that that could be read as "sidelining" the needs of wheelchair users. Rubbish.)

THE CHELSEA BARRACKS SITE

We expected to see the outline masterplan for the Chelsea Barracks site at the second meeting of the Community Liaison Group in the middle of March. We had been previously expecting to see it at the February meeting, which was postponed because the masterplan would not be ready in time. Well it was not ready this time either. It is now scheduled for presentation on 20 April.

There will be further street-based consultations in April and May and a workshop in late May. A planning application is expected to be submitted late in the summer.

LONDON 2012

The City of Westminster is one of the host boroughs for the Olympics and Paralympics—hence the major improvements in hand or being planned for Piccadilly Circus and Leicester Square in preparation for 2012.

The Olympic Park is by the River Lea in the London Borough of Newham. It's now possible to take a guided walk through the area, during which you will see Britain's oldest surviving tidal mill, a famous film studio, and breathtaking views of the Olympic Stadium, the Aquatics Centre, the Olympic Village and other 2012 venues as they rise from the ground.

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PATRON: HRH THE DUKE OF
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PRESIDENT: THE DEAN OF WESTMINSTER
CHAIRMAN: OLWEN ROWLANDS
REGISTERED CHARITY NO. 235400

The tour lasts just under two hours and costs £8 for adults and £5 for concessions (exact payment in cash only to the guide). It begins at Bromley-by-Bow Underground station at 11 am daily. Booking is preferred, but not essential. For more information and to book a tour, go to: www.toursof2012sites.com