

Minutes of Annual General Meeting

Held on Saturday 6 May 2017 at 11 am at Eaton House, Coventry

Present: Anna Douglas (Chair), Lou Robson (Deputy Chair), Katriona Byrne (Treasurer), Julia Lane (Secretary), and Committee Members: Joe Holyoak and Catherine Jones
plus 13 local members

1. **Apologies:** various local members
2. **Chair's Report - Anna Douglas presented the following Report.**

1. Summary of Activities

A West Midlands Regional Committee has been meeting formally now for two years and we currently meet monthly, with a formal structure that includes: Chair, Deputy Chair, Secretary, Treasurer and Casework Liaison officer. This year we appointed a Social Media coordinator, to help us deliver a more visible social media presence which has proved fruitful and which we will hear more about shortly.

The Committee has a very good diversity of skills, including planning, conservation and architectural knowledge, with time-served professional expertise. But we are a small group, of busy professionals, and we continue to negotiate our ambitions against our actual capacity for activity. We welcome additional people to take an active role on the Committee, particularly those able to work on casework in Coventry and outside Birmingham, and to lead on our event programme that we continue to maintain.

This last year our Committee has focused its attention on the following areas:

Education/ Social visits to regional places, open days.

Buildings under threat - alerting the national caseworker Henrietta Billings, now Tess Pinto, and the national Casework Committee, of buildings at risk or under threat in the WM region, providing support materials. At this point we tend towards being more reactive than pro-active.

Membership development - with the establishment of a FaceBook page and Twitter - which we will hear more about.

It is fair to say that we are not short of ideas for future development and activity, nor has 2016 seen a reduction in risk to our region's localities and buildings - regrettably. But we are restricted, as most volunteer groups are, by our ability to deliver, due to Committee members' professional work commitments.

However, whilst up to 2016 we tended as a Committee to operate reactively, this last year we have become more strategic and pro-actively involved in campaigning and project delivery:

In Birmingham, we have joined the post-war architecture consortium with architect Gavin Orton, the Brutiful Group, Manchester Modernists, and Birmingham City University, etc. which has been leading on good work meeting with Historic England, and drawing up an HLF funding bid to work on a local listings.

We are associated with another HLF funded project concerning the Wake Green Road Prefabs, a project of the Birmingham Conservation Trust and the Prefab Museum to restore and make publicly accessible which our current Deputy Chair has been closely involved with.

And in Coventry, prompted by a significant increase in development activity in the city - which has already seen some post-war buildings demolished - and the fact of the city bidding for City of Culture 2021 (in which we see an opportunity to highlight post-war built heritage), we have organised a series of workshops and meetings including:

a think-tank style workshop brought together with Jeremy Gould (author of HE 2015 published book on Coventry), and Keith Draper of the Civic Trust, and that has led to meetings with the City Council's Conservation Officer Chris Patrick, Historic England's Regional Director and Coventry Lead officer. Most recently we were delighted if not surprised to be invited to meet with the authority's Head of Planning, inviting us towards greater co-operation with her team. Coventry's City of Culture 2021 Bid Director Andrew Dixon, has responded well to our 'overtures' - and early meetings last year have certainly proved

influential and the city's post-war architecture is part of that bid. And indeed reflected in another recent strategic funding scheme, Great Places.

Coventry City Council - the only regional authority to receive funding through Historic England's Heritage Action Zone scheme - will now deliver a City Centre Conservation Zone proposal in which post-war built heritage is now sitting firmly alongside the mediaeval. Nevertheless, the city is under extreme financial pressure to 'let in the developers' and the Society will need to remain closely involved there for some time to come. Our current position, led by Head Office is to draw up our 'hit list' of buildings and built environment and try to work with the Planning Dept and Conservation Officer on their protection.

2. Finances

In line with the national Twentieth Century Society's regional strategy we are in the process of establishing a bank account, set up with the Co-op. This will enable the group to house an income stream derived from fees for regional day visits, and possibly formal funding in the form of grants, going towards activities in the future. However, this has proven not as straight forward as we might have expected

3. Membership

Membership of the Twentieth Century Society continues to grow and currently the West Midlands has approximately 150 members, of whom most are contactable via email. This last year we produced a membership postcard flyer, and these have worked well. Our events continue to draw good solid numbers each time; and it is through events that we primarily engage with our membership, though we aspire to have them more involved through casework research and appeals for information, and we have had some good response to requests for in-situ photographs, and further research when requested. It would be an ambition to grow this 'eyes and ears' role of our membership's participation in the Society. And to this end our Committee Member Katriona Byrne has secured funding to hold a How To Workshop in the autumn for our members and non members in preparing listing applications, etc.

Membership procedure is about to change at Head Office. Direct debit instalment payment will be offered to members, and an associate scheme of 'supporters' (not members) at a discounted rate.

4. Casework

The Committee has two casework leads in expertise of Birmingham based architects Joe Holyoak and Larry Priest (though Larry will officially step back as of this meeting). Our / their current way of working, and in line with Head Office guidelines, is to alert Tess Pinto with our concerns.

2017 - Following the demolition of the Birmingham Library we might hope things could only get better. But our combined region continues to undervalue the post-war (hence the formation of the Birmingham consortium).

The work of John Madin continues to be unappreciated, and attempts for listing applications have not been able to change attitudes, there now being few of his works left. The refusal to list Smallbrook Queensway, in Birmingham was another significant 'defeat' but along with the demolition of Madin's Library, has led to the formation of a very pro-active consortium.

The Society's application to save the demolition of the 1980s copper link bridge from Coventry's Civic Building 1 to the Council House, proposed by Tess Pinto, failed and it was demolished in March; but again, arguably led to the Head of Planning to invite us in for 'tea' to discuss how we can collaborate more. However, we have been unable to save the Twenty Twentyman church in Radford, Coventry, one of the few 1950s churches to be built nationally. The splendidly quirky Dept of Housing in Coventry also was demolished this year, despite our attempts, this time to get HO interested to take it on.

5. Wins

So have we had any significant gains this last year? The Co-op Building in Coventry, though turned down for listing, will now be redeveloped into city centre apartments by a sympathetic developer. The Prefabs in Birmingham now are hopefully going to have a bright new future both as homes, as well as open for public visiting and interpretation. And Historic England have said they would be open to reconsidering a new application for listing on The Elephant, should, there be new information forthcoming on the building. They also tell us they are 'watching' Coventry closely, through the Heritage Action Zone, with an appointed Coventry Officer.

4. Threats

The biggest threat to the two regional cities will continue to be uncontrolled and or unsympathetic development. In Coventry, there is now, perhaps a delayed development wave both as the Authority puts into place new city growth plans, as well as the growth of the University of Coventry, hungry for city centre sites (not buildings) and student accommodation. Council Housing estates are threatened with infill expansion as the post-war emphasis on green spaces is now perceived as 'green deserts' areas, too expensive to maintain, and offering housing developers scope. Whilst churches are not immune either as congregations dwindle church authorities like other state bodies look to shed 'waste'.

5. C20 West Midlands Events

In 2016, we conducted trips into unknown parts of the region: Hereford, Leamington Spa, Nuneaton; as well as Coventry with Jeremy Gould, and the Birmingham suburbs, as well as participating in the Birmingham Prefabs event.

While these are proving great social events and continue to draw new members to them, the question of how our 'intelligence gathering' through conducting these trips, i.e. research and photographs, might contribute to future understanding, interpretation and protection, and support the work of Head Office, continues to evolve. Ideally, the Committee would like an Events secretary, and / or an Events sub-group.

6. The Future

We have plenty of potential for growth and influence, however, the key issue continues to be our capacity as a Committee to act strategically as well as reactively. And we welcome new members to the Committee.

3. Treasurer's Report

Katriona Byrne presented the Treasurer's Report for the period from 26 April 2016 to 6 May 2017. Income from events came to £466, and expenses were £341, leaving a balance of £125. Adding the balance brought forward from the previous year of £220 gives a balance of £345 to carry forward.

It is planned to open a bank account.

Funding of £2,400 has been obtained for 2 half day events for casework training.

Katriona was thanked for her work.

4. Social Media

Catherine Jones, Social Media Officer, appealed for photos and encouraged members to make more use of FaceBook. We will email members with information about using our social media. Catherine has been on an inexpensive but very useful training which will assist us with promoting membership of the Society through our events and raising awareness of the buildings at risk.

5. Election of Officers: The following were nominated, seconded, and elected:

5.1. Chair: Anna Douglas

5.2. Secretary: Julia Lane

5.3. Treasurer: Katriona Byrne

5.4. Social Media Officer: Catherine Jones

5.5. Committee members: Lou Robson, Joe Holyoak, Matt Vaughan, Gary Davies, Paul Billinger

5.6. The Deputy Chair position will remain vacant for the time being.

6. Any Other Business

Lou Robson reported that 200 people came to the Prefabs event last autumn, and there will be a further event in July. The Prefabs Partnership in which we participate has received a £4,000 grant from HE as seed money and is setting up a Friends of Prefabs Group.

7. Close of Meeting