

West Midlands Regional Group Annual Report for AGM 2018

1.1. Summary

A West Midlands committee continues to meet formally the last Monday of the month in Birmingham. The Committee has a very good diversity of skills, including planning, conservation and architectural knowledge, with time-served professional expertise. This year we have recruited 5 new members (at least), nevertheless we are a group of busy professionals, and we continue to negotiate our ambitions against our actual capacity for activity. This last year our Committee has focused its attention on the following areas:

- Education/ Social visits - a monthly programme to regional places, including Birmingham Catholic Churches, Shrewsbury, Droitwich Spa, Wolverhampton.
- Buildings under threat - having a caseworker lead in Joe Holyoak who alerts the HO caseworker Tess Pinto, and the National Casework Committee, of buildings at risk or under threat in the WM region; where we can we provide support materials to HO requests and our regional members continue to support us in such requests too.
- Membership development - continuing to use social media.
- Partnerships: we continue to work with other groups and initiatives including:
 - In Birmingham, we continue to partner with the Post-war architecture consortium initiated by Architect Gavin Orton, the Brutiful Group, Birmingham Modernists, and BCU, 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 affiliated to the Wake Green Rd Prefabs project in association with Committee member Lou Robson.
 - In Coventry we are working with HE around the HAZ initiative; Great Places, and HOD.

1.2. Finances

We now have a bank account with Lloyds (see Treasurer's Report)

1.3. Membership

Membership continues to grow. Approximately 180 members of The Twentieth Century Society live in the West Midlands Region, which includes Staffordshire, Shropshire, West Midlands, Warwickshire, Worcestershire, Herefordshire, and Oxfordshire.

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 case-work 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 secured funding to hold two How To Go about Listing Workshops for our members and non members and these proved popular. This autumn we will be organising an Art Deco day, which we expect to be very popular.

1.4. Casework

The Committee has one case-work lead architect Joe Holyoak. The current way of working, and in line with Head office guidelines, is to alert Tess Pinto with our concerns which in turn she decides whether to take to the monthly Casework Committee at HO. The new application for listing on The Elephant, in Coventry led by Joe, is still with the Minister. We hope with the new evidence Joe discovered, namely the original plans for the building and a named architect in Granville Lewis.

1.5. Threats and Opportunities

In Coventry, prompted by a significant increase in development activity in the city - which has already seen some post-war buildings demolished, and will continue apace throughout 2018/19/20 we are working with Historic England's Heritage Action Zone scheme - that aims to deliver a City Centre Conservation Zone. The scheme has proven difficult and controversial, recent listings, as members may know, have proven unpopular with both the City Council (Upper Precinct) and the University of Coventry (Civic Centre 2); and relations are, I think fair to say, frosty and suspicious. We were very concerned to hear of the recent unplanned departure of our good ally Chris Patrick who was the city's conservation officer, who though a medievalist had championed post-war design in the city trying himself the old Coop Building listed, amongst antipathy and hostility from his own employees.

However, it is not all depressing news in Coventry, winning, if anyone still does not know, City of Culture 2021, will, we hope, give the post-war ambience of the city a context in which to shine, and developers such as Ian Harrabin have acquired the old Coventry Telegraph Building for redevelopment as a 50s themed hotel. If anyone wants to see the building before it is closed for building works, do go there before the end of June. It is currently in use as a self-servicing arts space, and is hugely photogenic!

We believe there is much we can do in Coventry, working alongside other interested parties and projects, that include HE, Great Places Scheme (they have approached the Society to help with a post-war popular walking guide), the University of Coventry (Head of Graphics is working on an Urban Rooms project and sees potential for joint working); and HOD (trying to get post-war architectural gems open in Sept).

Threats:

- Coventry Train station
- Lower Precinct and environs in Coventry
- Birmingham Airport's first airport building from the 30s

1.6. 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.

To this end, one of our Committee Members Roxie Collins and myself are working up a proposal to HE to fund a part-time Public Participation Coordinator, who could take on projects over three years designed to increase public awareness, interest and support for the post-war urban realm. This is a project that could deliver the scale of projects beyond us at the moment and there is great potential to partner with University of Coventry and Great Places on this initiative.

The Twentieth Century Society

To end my report, I am saddened to report the recent death of Alan Clawley, whom many of you will know as the tireless campaigner against the demolition of the Birmingham Library, and general champion of John Madin, and indeed the author of the Madin monograph. Joe Holyoak will be writing about Alan in a forthcoming Journal.

Finally to thank all the Committee members for all their hard work this last year, and to Julia who is standing down as Secretary. Particular thanks to Katriona for tirelessly continuing with sorting out our Bank account and for leading on a number of our day visits, and to Catherine for being our social media expert, populating our Facebook page with photos and text, as well as organising visits to interesting places too. And for today's flapjacks!

I will also be standing down as Chair as of this September, at least for 2019.

Anna Douglas

12 May 2018