**West Midlands Regional Group Annual Report**

**Chair’s Report to regional AGM April 2019 – Katriona Byrne**

1. **Change of personnel**

This year has seen a change in personnel, beginning with a new secretary James Phillips, as our outgoing secretary Julia Lane stepped down, to take up a position as secretary to the Society itself. Anna Douglas stepped down as Chair to concentrate on her PhD in September and was solely missed, however I then stepped into the Chair’s role, having a new job in BCU, running conservation programmes, and no longer having the conflict of interest that I had while working with Historic England. This meant the Treasurer’s role became vacant and Matt Vaughan stepped into this role. A new role was created for Events Officer which saw Catherine Jones elected, formalising what she was already doing with myself. With the loss of Anna and the local Coventry link we were pleased that Dr. Geraldine Hammersley stepped into that role and is our de facto Coventry Officer with further input from Alan Van Wijgerden.

We were fortunate to be able to draw on a new raft of people to fill these roles and we are open to further roles being created if there are people out there who fancy it.

1. **Meetings**

A West Midlands committee continues to meet formally the last Monday of the month in Birmingham, generally in Cherry Red’s on John Bright Street, where we are given a room free of charge, and they benefit from our custom. We tend not to meet in December or August, and this year because I was ill we had no meeting in March sow e average 10 meetings a year. The Committee has a very good diversity of skills, including planning, conservation and architectural knowledge, with time-served professional expertise. This year we continued our practice of inviting people to committee meetings as guests to see if they are interested in getting more involved so we have had a number of guests this year.

However as always we are a group of busy professionals, so not everyone can make every meeting and we also have to negotiate our ambitions against our actual capacity for activity.

1. **Finances**

Having taken a long time to get abank account we now have to change signatories which is taking a long time but I hope we will get that sorted in the next month. The Treasurer’s report is coming up later.

1. **Events**

We tend to be quite successful running events. We will have a report from the Events Officer later on but this year we trialled a number of new type of events, all of which were successful. Success is measured not only in financial terms but in terms of the response we get from participants and how excited they make us. One of the events we trialled were member-only events, where we visited an artist’s studio, of George Wagstaff in Coventry, another was our Architecture Slam in January where we had a slideshow format. At some events we manage to get into a number of sites, not just look at the outside, but as we like to make donations at these, they don’t always make a profit but as long as we have a mixture that’s fine.

Our events were broadly based across the region to reach our members and we get 15-25 people attending each event.

We are running a national event this year in Birmingham re-visiting the city centre with Joe Holyoak, no exact date yet. And we are gearing up to arranging the national AGM in Coventry in 2020 so we may be looking for some extra help on this.

1. **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 Grace Etherington with our concerns, and she decides whether to take to the monthly National Casework Committee at HO. Regrettably after 2 ½ years’ wait we were informed that the application for listing on The Elephant, in Coventry, led by Joe, was rejected.

The National Casework Committee has commented on applications in the regions such as the concrete repairs and the new extension to Coventry cathedral.

We often get alerted to sites which are at risk form members of the public or our own members but we struggle to mount a successful campaign to save these or even to co-ordinate a response. We had a couple of instances of partnership working on this, where we were alerted to matters by Brutiful Birmingham, thanks to Mary Keating’s communication, and we looked at sites with her, including the Flapper pub on the canals behind New Library, one of the earliest of the new canalside pubs which epitomised the canal revivalism that was starting; we also visited and were invited to meetings about the House of Fraser, former Rackham’s Department Store, on St Philip’s Square and….. We used our contacts around the city to try and get a better design for the retention and redevelopment of this iconic building.

1. **Other activities/news**

We continue to work with other groups and initiatives including:

a.Brutiful Birmingham, as above.

b.The Post-war architecture consortium initiated by Gavin Orton, the Brutiful Group, Birmingham Modernists, and BCU, which through new Chair of the Civic Society Matt Vaughan, submitted an application for HLF funding bid to work on a local listings.

c.We are affiliated to the Wake Green Rd Prefabs project in association with Committee member Lou Robson.

d.In Coventry we are working with HE and other bodies around the Heritage Action Zone Initiative, the Great Places scheme, and City of Culture 2021. However Coventry currently has no Conservation Officer but there is a lot of potential there with 200 people being employed by City of Culture projects. We have great plans to appoint a paid Engagement Officer but have not managed to date to fill in the necessary grant application forms or to finalise a brief for the role.

1. **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.

While traditionally it has been our events programme that has engaged members we also now have a significant social media presence that also engages members and a wider group of people. So we will hear from Catherine Jones further on this.

The Committee inaugurated an award to a Conservation student at BCU for the best essay on C20 architecture, planning or design, which would include a year’s membership. If anyone here would like to sponsor that please get in touch with me or any member of the committee.

I proposed to Catherine Croft, Director of C20, that we, as a trial, offer free or very cheap membership to students, with my own new Year 1 students studying conservation as guinea pigs. They get free IHBC membership for 1.5 years while they are studying and most go on to become members. I proposed we would offer something similar for C20 Society. This was deemed impossible unless it was put to the national AGM. So I would like to ask for support from this meeting to put a motion seeking a trial of this sort.

1. **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.

Finally thanks to the Committee members for all their hard work this last year and to you the members who make it most enjoyable.