

The Twentieth Century Society, Northwest Regional Group Chair's report for the year ending 31 December 2019

Committee and membership

Following the retirement of Aidan Turner-Bishop I took over as Chair of C20 Society Northwest at the 2019 AGM. At that time, he was Acting Chair but had served as Chair for many years, as well as Treasurer. He has long been at the centre of the Society's work in the region and continues to play an active role, with a particular knowledge of modern architects: he contributed four short essays on northwest churches for *100 Churches, 100 Years*, published by Batsford for the Society in March. He also brings his considerable experience to the planning of events.

C20 membership in the northwest is now around 90 but in common with similar organisations, we face difficulties in recruiting sufficient active members to maintain a programme of events and play a proactive regional casework role. Last year the committee looked at options to respond to this and decided that for the time being, we would reduce our activity, so in the past year we have done fewer events than we would have liked. This situation had occurred before, indeed in the 1990s the group completely ceased to exist, before it was reanimated by Aidan and Eddy Rhead.

The role of the committee is to support the objectives of the Society and promote its presence in the northwest through organising events and as a local contact for casework issues. We hope that members value the programme as an additional benefit of membership, as well as an opportunity to meet other members. The committee is quite small and operates on a fairly informal basis, within the framework set out by the Society. At the moment it comprises the elected positions of chair and treasurer and a further four or five members regularly attending. A member is active in Manchester Civic Society and through her we also have strong links with SAVE. We circulate agendas and minutes to a small group outside the committee who contribute to our work in various ways but do not attend. At the moment we have no vice-chair or secretary, although I fulfil part of the latter role by taking minutes. We all recognise the need to enlarge the pool of active members and have pursued strategies to achieve this, so far with limited success. A priority for the coming year has to be to make some progress, to ensure our long-term viability.

We held six business meetings in 2019. For 2020 we agreed to meet on a quarterly basis, with increased communication by email between meetings, recognising that committee members are also involved in other activities. I attended the C20 regional chairs meeting in London in March and in Birmingham in November. Our new email address (northwest@c20.org.uk) was introduced in 2019, strengthening our identity as representing the national society in the northwest of England. Several newsletters were emailed to members.

Programme and activities

We invited C20 Society members Adrian Jones and Chris Matthews, who jointly blog as *Jonestheplanner*, to take an irreverent and perceptive look at recent architecture and planning decisions in Manchester (7 March). Drawing from their experience of other major cities they suggested that despite the impressive scale of new development, Manchester is really not being ambitious enough about its future. The event was widely promoted amongst professional planners and architects, attracting a good number of attendees.

We continued our fruitful association with the Modernist Society by jointly organising a coach tour on 6 April of sites connected with the sculptor Mitzi Cunliffe in and

around the city, led by art historian/curator Ann Sumner. It was a great success, with over 30 places taken. A widely distributed trail leaflet was published, produced by the Modernist Society, with copy compiled by Aidan.

The leaflet was funded by the crowdfunding campaign to commemorate Mitzi Cunliffe in 2018, her centenary year. The Society has been at the forefront of promoting interest in the artist, ever since Ann Sumner's article in the magazine in 2016. Our activities in 2018 -19 helped Ann secure a Visiting Professorship at Manchester Metropolitan University to undertake further study on Cunliffe and other women artists in the city. As part of this research project the university agreed to commission a short book on the artist from her. She was unable to take her draft copy to publication due to personal reasons but I have now taken over the remaining work and we expect it to be published in the spring.

National C20 trustee Andrew Jackson, who recently moved to the northwest, organised the 'national' weekend tour to the Wirral and North Wales on 5 – 7 July, attracting 21 attendees. He also set up a successful visit to the Festival of Britain archives at Sheffield Hallam University on 22 November.

Aidan and I contributed to an essay by Morag Rose about the 2015 campaign to save Library Walk, Manchester, for a book on Placemaking, published by Routledge.

Casework

I attend monthly meetings of Manchester City Council's Conservation and Listed Buildings Panel, along with another committee member Margaret Collier (representing the Civic Society). The majority of applications do not refer specifically to buildings which fall within the society's remit but during the past year plans for sensitive renovation have been submitted affecting the former Daily Express building (Owen Williams 1939, Grade II*). Concern has been expressed at the condition of the Hollings Building (aka the Toast Rack, Grade II) and the status of its development plans. The Unicorn Hotel in Manchester city-centre was listed Grade II. The Pavilion and Wall in Manchester's Piccadilly Gardens is the only building in the UK by the great Japanese master of concrete, Tadeo Ando. Regrettably it is far from being universally admired (mainly due to poor maintenance and Ando's concept not being carried through) and has been under threat for some time. In March it was decided not to demolish it completely and the latest plans show the loss of a small section, with the remainder becoming a "green wall". It is to be hoped that it will cease being a feature of controversy, allowing a period of calm before it becomes eligible for listing in 2032.

In March 2019 we became aware of the threats faced by the Piazza Fountain in Liverpool. Known locally as "the bucket fountain", it was the work of engineer and artist Richard Huws (1902-1980). We drew attention to it through the Society's magazine and shortly afterwards it was listed Grade II. The committee is also concerned about the ongoing work at Herbert Rowse's India Buildings, Liverpool (Grade II*). The triumphant rebirth of Preston Bus Station is now nearly complete, only a few years after the entire structure was destined for demolition. It stands as an impressive example of how C20 can intervene to play a major role in preserving twentieth century buildings of outstanding quality.

Howard Smith, Chair Twentieth Century Society, Northwest (January 2020)

The Twentieth Century Society is a company limited by guarantee, registered in England no 05330664, registered office 70 Cowcross Street, London EC1M 6EJ. Registered charity no 1110244