

The Twentieth Century Society, Northwest Regional Group
Annual General Meeting February 2021
Chair's report for the year ending 31 December 2020

Introduction

We held our first meetings of 2020, the AGM and a committee meeting on 3 February, before the pandemic began to take hold, which prevented further meetings taking place. The situation has continued into the present year so we will not be holding an AGM as usual, a decision taken by the committee and endorsed by the society's Honorary Secretary. The Chair, Treasurer and other members of the committee retain their positions until the next AGM, to be held in early 2022. The documents with this report are sent to members 'for information' as they do not require members' approval.

Our programme of events was also significantly affected although we were able to organise our only tour of the year just days ahead of the lockdown measures coming into effect. From that point onwards we concentrated on supporting the national casework effort, an emphasis that was reflected in the four regional e-newsletters sent out to members.

We have not been able to use Zoom, either for group committee meetings or talks as not all committee members are equipped with the necessary technology, but this is something we hope to remedy in 2021. We are currently planning a Zoom talk/slide show for mid-April (utilising the Cowcross Street account) and we also hope to get together for an event later in the year.

The society magazine goes from strength to strength and we were well represented in the two magazines published in 2020, with short contributions on current casework and a report on the tour of 4 March.

Review of the year

Launch of Herbert Rowse book in Liverpool, 23 January

Organised by Andrew Jackson (trustee and national coordinator who lives in the region) to promote the recently published monograph on the important Liverpool architect by Historic England.

New Century Hall and the Old Bank building, Manchester, 4 March

In the shadow of the famous CIS Tower in central Manchester lies New Century Hall (G. S. Hay of the C.W.S. and Gordon Tait of Sir John Burnett, Tait & Partners, 1963; Grade II). Although originally built as a conference hall, it is easy to visualise it as a very successful music venue in the 1960s. Our visit immediately preceded the removal for cleaning of a huge concrete sculptural wall piece by Alan Boyson, so this was a unique chance to see it in its original state. We also visited the adjacent Old Bank Building (Co-op architect W. A. Johnson, 1928; Grade II). The tour was guided by Stephen McCusker from Manchester School of Architecture, and promoted in association with the Modernist Society. It was an immediate hit, forcing us to arrange another tour on the day to cope with the demand.

Mitzi Cunliffe: An American in Manchester

We set aside funds for this project through the allocation of remaining crowdfunded monies from an earlier Mitzi Cunliffe project in 2018, jointly organised with the Modernist Society. I was invited in a personal capacity to edit and assist with the production of Ann Sumner's

book on Cunliffe, due to be published in 2020 by the Manchester Metropolitan University. However, in the closing weeks of the year, with text and designs complete, they decided to pause plans to set up a publishing imprint and it is now hoped that it will be published in 2021.

Casework

Desk-based casework was our main activity this year, involving the following buildings:

- St John's Beacon, Liverpool (aka Radio City Tower; James A. Roberts Associates, 1969).

In July we prepared a submission to the Society's casework committee for listing as it was under threat by a planned zipwire. We also liaised with individuals and conservation groups in the city. The committee decided not to take it further but this innovative structure was subsequently listed Grade II.

- Albert Bridge House, Manchester (H. E. Banks for the Ministry of Works 1959).

We contributed a section to the national caseworker's submission and I also wrote a separate letter to HE supporting listing. A decision is pending.

- The George Mayer-Marton mosaic-mural at the Church of the Holy Rosary, Oldham and the former Abbey cinema in Wavertree, Liverpool.

We were contacted by SAVE about these two current campaigns in the region. Letters to HE in support of listing were sent in both instances and the outcome is awaited.

- War Memorial Chapel at Rossall School, Fleetwood.

Concern was expressed to the society's caseworkers about the removal of an item from the War Memorial Chapel (Sir Robert Lorimer, 1926; not forming part of the overall listing of the Grade II 1861 school chapel by E. G. Paley).

- Pavilion, Piccadilly gardens, Manchester (Tadao Ando, 2001)

We have been aware for some time that this, the only building in the UK by the great Japanese master of concrete, was at risk. In November a section of free-standing wall was demolished prompting action on our part. With the assistance of the local architect and engineer who worked on the pavilion, an article was prepared for the C20 Society magazine, for publication in early 2021. We expect to report on further developments in due course.

Over the past year we have begun to establish a constructive relationship with Historic England. They now send us information on new listings in the region within our period, thus providing ideas for future tours and adding to our knowledge of the architectural heritage of the northwest. The largest single category is war memorials, as might be expected, but it also includes three Liverpool pubs: the Vines (Grade II*), Philharmonic (I) and the lesser known Peter Kavanagh's pub (II). The former Halton Borough Transport bus depot was listed (II) along with a Pickett-Hamilton fort (which is ingeniously concealed below the surface when not in use, to be raised in an emergency) at the former Burtonwood airfield (II).

Thank you for your continuing membership of the society during these challenging times.

Howard Smith

Chair, The Twentieth Century Society, Northwest Regional Group