

· THE REBIRTH OF COVENT GARDEN ·

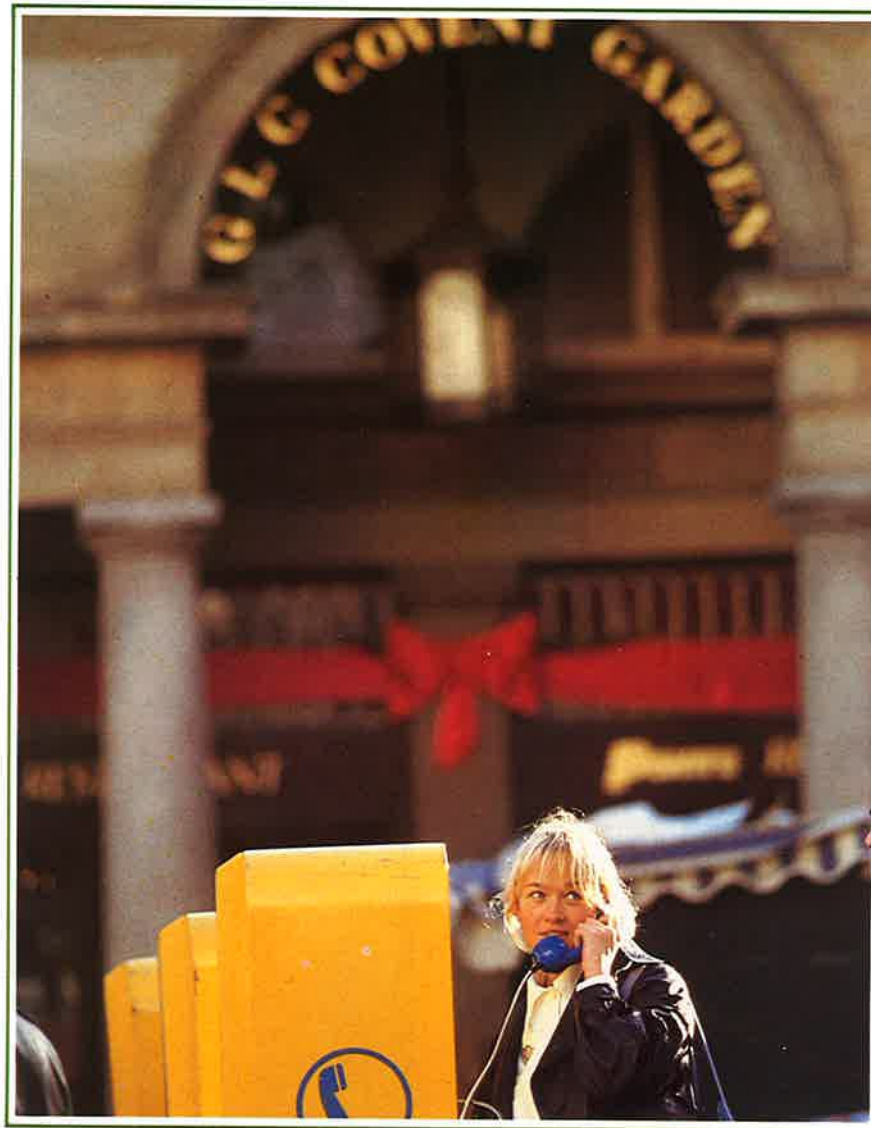
A P L A C E F O R P E O P L E



GREATER LONDON COUNCIL

• THE REBIRTH OF COVENT GARDEN •

A P L A C E F O R P E O P L E



A GLC PUBLICATION WRITTEN BY JUDY HILLMAN



Comprehensive redevelopment was a post war idea with a respectable pedigree, which in the wrong hands threatened to rip the heart out of our city.

Schemes which seem laughable now, were serious contenders not so long ago for prizes from the commentators of the day. Thus the scheme which would have obliterated Piccadilly Circus as we know and love it, and replaced it with a mass of glass and concrete completely alien to the traditions of the area was described by the Architects Journal as 'brilliant'. Similar schemes were floated for other parts of Central London in a wave of new era euphoria. This vision however was based more on 'Dan Dare' comics than the historic traditions of London. The brave new world seemed a much more exciting place to be than building on what we already had. Coupled with the idea that Cities weren't really places where people *should* want to live, it was both inevitable that inhuman schemes would be produced, and that eventually there would be a reaction.

Such a reaction came just in time to save Covent Garden from destruction.

In retrospect everyone now applauds the success of the Covent Garden development, but how many of those same people were so eager to support the early campaign to save it from demolition? In truth few; but those of us who have been active in the community movement in areas like Covent Garden, Waterloo, Bermondsey, Hammersmith, Spitalfields and Fitzrovia for many years are not looking for new found allies. That is an inevitable by product of success.

What we stand for and what Covent Garden is a testament to is that the combination of Londoners determined to defend their traditions and an elected strategic authority such as the GLC are still the best guarantee of the secure and dignified development of the Capital.

At a time when planning and especially democratic planning is so under attack it is useful to restate that the Covent Garden Development would have been inconceivable without a GLC. This is not a case of blowing ones own trumpet:

- Buying the land required a GLC
- Drawing up an agreed plan with all parties concerned: local business and local councils required a GLC
- Implementing an Action Area Plan over 10 years required the resources and commitment

of a GLC, given even with shifting political control

- The dedication, caring and devotion to the Covent Garden ideal, required officers of the highest calibre – again part of a proud GLC tradition
- Maintaining the ideas and ideals behind the plan still requires a GLC

Covent Garden will be successful long after other trendy property schemes have been forgotten, because it is, and was about people and the best traditions of London.

In that respect it is both a milestone *and* a signpost. If it is not heeded the ideas that gave us the Piccadilly Circus schemes of the past will return.

If you think this is wrong, look no further than Canary Wharf!

George Nicholson



Ed Gange



• CONTENTS •

Introduction	5
A little history from the days of yore	9
In days less yore	14
Planning the new garden	20
The beginning of new growth	24
The making of The Market	29
GLC planting around the piazza	37
More good things in the garden	41
Private planting in the garden	44
Housing... the key to the community's future	49
Some lessons... some concern	52

'We were trying to perform well in a political and social field. The shareholders in the GLC are slightly different from those in a company. We were concerned about the amount of interest, entertainment, fun, pleasure for people you could create, not through planning really, but through operation in the property field by reconstructing buildings, by estate management and by the creation of events and happenings. It had to be a social and people success, making people happy and making them cheerful. Other things like providing housing are more conventional aims. We had a dual responsibility—as far as local people were concerned give them back a viable community and as far as Londoners were concerned this exciting place. You have to have incredible patience. You have to generate a fairly big and loose consensus as to what everybody wants for an area like Covent Garden and having got that, you have really got to stick at that because things tend not to happen.'

Geoffey Holland, GLC Covent Garden team leader

'There has to be a special policy for the tenant mix in The Market and that means taking cognisance of what they can afford within reason. If there is a free-for-all, the area won't survive many, many years.'

Bob Harris, chairman and managing director of Charles H Fox Ltd. and vice-chairman of the Forum

'It's been a partnership between politicians, officers and the local community. We have jointly planned the area to the benefit of business, employees and residents. This has been a very long and very, very detailed process.'

David Bieda, director of the Central London Youth Project and member of the Forum

'It is possible, I suppose, because there was a big battle to save Covent Garden that that in itself has brought together the different interests and different people locally. We are the ones who are supposed to reconcile the different conflicting interests. There is the London-wide interest in Covent Garden. It is a place for tourists and lots of those tourists are Londoners. Then there's the interest of the local community. I think Covent Garden is a pleasant place for tourists and it's a pleasant place because it has not been made too commercial and too touristy. People going there appreciate the character and there is just about an uneasy truce between the community and the tourists.'

Edward Gouge, chairman of the GLC Covent Garden Committee

'Covent Garden is a place where people live and have their being and have done over the centuries. We are surrounded by history and in a way you can't help becoming part of the history of the future. Therefore you feel you are carrying on the work of the people who were here when Inigo Jones built the piazza, of all the other things that have happened. You are taking up the burden they put down. I go to St Clement Dane's church. There is in there a pew Dr Johnson always used. Turner lived in Maiden Lane. it's in the fabric of the buildings, it's in the place, it's in the air. There are not ghosts so much as they've left some part of themselves here.'

Grace Cook, chairman of the Covent Garden Community Association

'For once they've not done it all wrong.'

London taxi driver

· INTRODUCTION ·



The compact city centre which is Covent Garden has emerged once more as a place for people. No mere London village, the interlocking framework of piazza, terraced streets, cobbled yards and gaslit alleyways provides a new urban stage on which all citizens are players. Some may have token rush-on parts, as full of tension, they squeeze yet one more fixture into a regularly overcrowded day. Thankfully these are few. The vast majority has consciously decided, if but for half an hour, to join in gladly with the theatre of these streets, as did their London predecessors, with pleasure, expectation and a sense of fun.

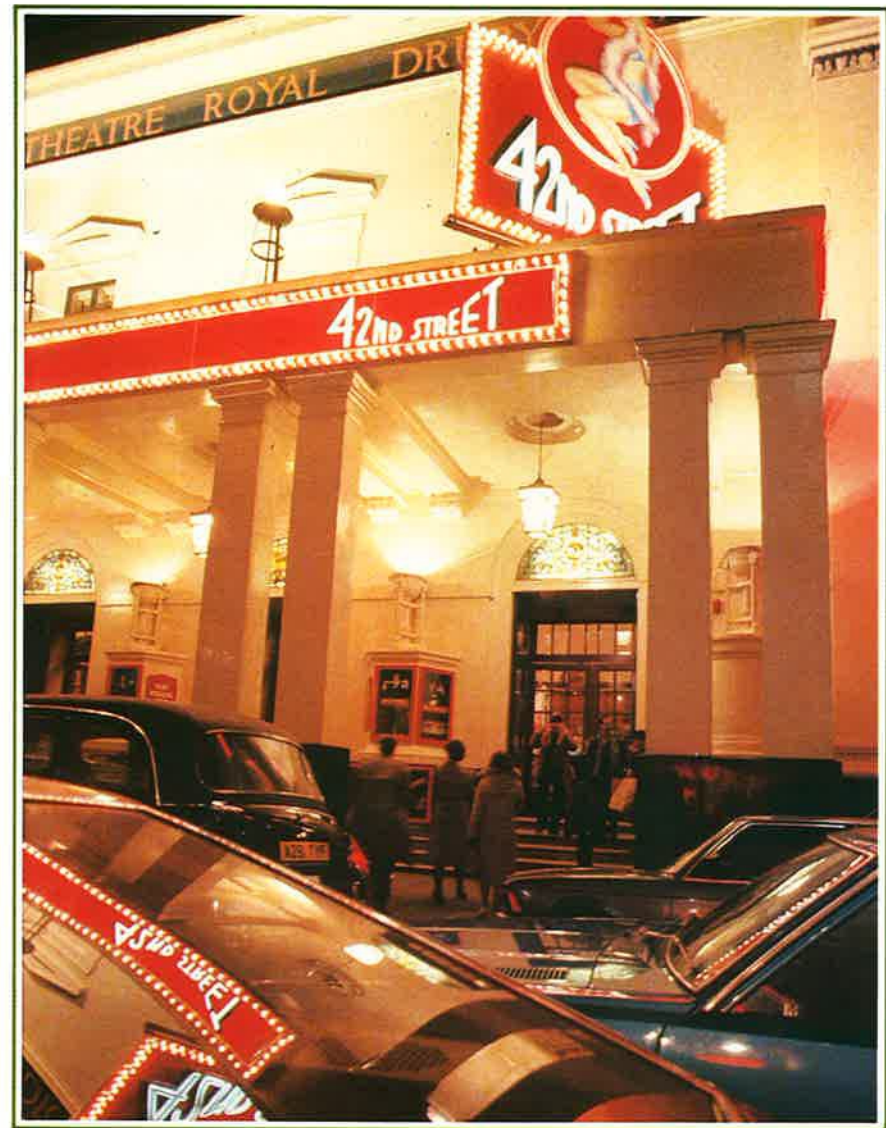
Many are visitors from other parts of the country and from overseas. For others Covent Garden is the pleasant backcloth to their working lives. For yet others it is the town in which they live. At each level, the area now hums with new vitality. However while decay and dereliction are almost forgotten, the process of renewal has been slow and sometimes painful. Regeneration within any city takes time, patience and application before the early seeds of positive change take root.

In Covent Garden, it is now 18 years since the Greater London Council published its original plan for the area and 12 since the former

wholesale market for vegetables, fruit and flowers moved out, leaving behind, not just emptiness and insecurity, but also opportunity to recreate an area in which Londoners can, and do, take pride.

Following a disastrous start, in which council and local people fought in opposition camps, the new Covent Garden emerged – not by chance, but with the help of a precise plan for action, drawn up between the former warring factions, investment by both public and private sectors and sensitive urban management in the tradition of the best of English village squires, great family estates and wiser city fathers. To this has been added the passion, care and creativity of a host of individuals – local afficiandos all, whether business men and women, residents, community activists, developers or GLC politicians and professionals.

The perforce prolonged gestation has seen each of the two main political parties twice take over the reins of control. While there have been changes of emphasis towards local economic or local community development, the main thrust has remained undisturbed to continue the creation of a vibrant area in which more people live, more people work, more people shop and thousands saunter around in sheer enjoyment.







Covent Garden is city life in the tradition of the metropolis at its best – a market place, a meeting place, a place of entertainment and ideas, a place to live. In 15 years more than 500 new homes have been built, many more improved. The residential population has risen by more than 2,000. In addition, the area now boasts more than 7,000 extra jobs in shops, restaurants, wine bars, advertising, design, photography, publishing and light industry to replace those lost with the departure of the market and a major magazine publisher. As land owner of some 10 per cent of property in the area, the GLC has played a key role in taking initial risks, in setting quality standards for physical renewal through conservation and new development, in providing new homes and jobs, and perhaps most important, in the creation of political and economic confidence for many others to make an even greater contribution. As a result a strong local community has been reinforced and the capital city has a new heart.

While the GLC's abolition marks the end of an era, pressures for further dramatic change still exist which could all too easily undermine Covent Garden's special qualities. In particular rising land values and the prospect of a number of major developments could change its present character of originality, variety and an outward-looking network of small businesses and activities for one in which bigger corporations

and well-known multiple or chain stores predominate – in other words a place like many another.

The GLC, with overall planning powers and a detailed management role in relation to its own properties, has understood the need to look to the longer term, check excess, accept sometimes a lower return on individual properties for the good of the whole and generally hold the area in trust. Its successors in planning, development and management of The Market and the rest of the 96 acres will need to tread warily. They will be blamed if there is any deterioration in Covent Garden's ambience or style.

· A LITTLE HISTORY FROM THE DAYS OF YORK ·



While traditional, sensible and often enlightening to turn over a few stones from the past, in Covent Garden that process can all too easily become an end in itself. The happy wanderer through history is hooked by the famous, infamous and surging crowds of Londoners who have over the centuries here lived in terraces and tenements, strolled its streets, watched both plays and players, formed coterie of bonhomie and intellect, quaffed

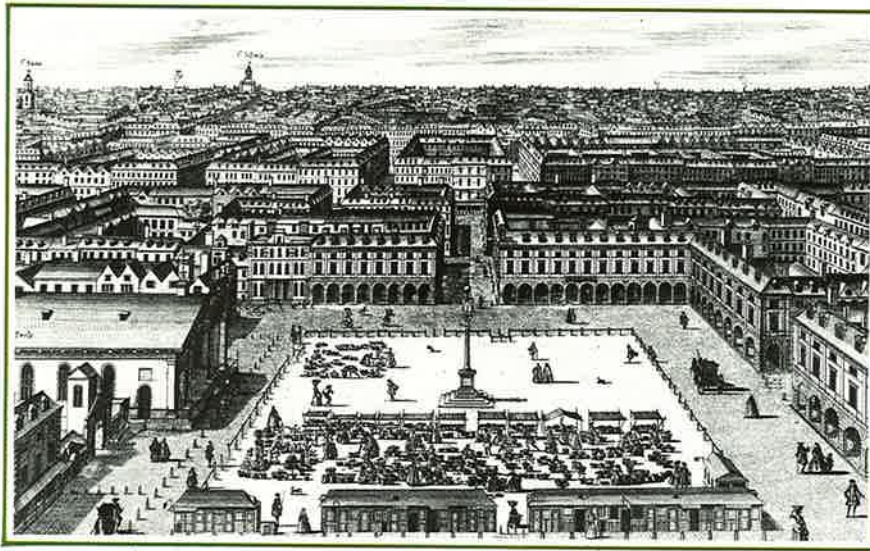
coffee and good ale, wined, dined, bought, sold, worshipped, loved, died – as indeed they do today.

The artist Turner was born and lived in Maiden Lane. So too did poet Marvell and French writer and philosopher Voltaire. Garrick the actor was resident in No.27 Southampton Street. The Garrick Club, founded first in King Street, numbered novelists Thackeray and Dickens among its members and for Dickens in particular the area became an important source of ideas. Novelist Fielding had a house in Bow Street as did Grinling Gibbons, sculptor in wood, and Royal physician to William III and Mary, Dr. Radcliffe. Dr. Johnson was a regular visitor, meeting Boswell for the first time in actor Tom Davies's bookshop at No. 8 Russell Street and dining with some simplicity at the Pine Apple in New Street for eight pence – six pence paid for the meat, one penny the bread and one penny went to the waiter.

Many parliamentarians including several regicide members of the Long Parliament lived in considerable comfort around the piazza and in King and Henrietta Streets. Oliver Cromwell was at one time resident of Drury Lane, as was Nell Gwynn. Sir Peter Lely and Hogarth formed part of an artistic community in the piazza. Dryden frequented Will's coffee house in Russell Street, Addison and Steele that of Button.



View of the Market from James Street by Phoebus Levin 1864, Courtesy of the Museum of London



Piazza in the 17th Century



Piazza in the 18th Century

Bow Street bred a series of different exclusive coteries – the Rationals, the House of Uncommons, the Mulberries and, within the new Covent Garden theatre in 1735, the Sublime Society of Beefsteaks. Forced out by one of two fires which destroyed that theatre's fabric, the diners then moved on first to the Bedford Coffee House and then the Lyceum. The theatre was rebuilt, only to burn again during a bal masque, and was rebuilt yet again as the Italian Opera House in 1858. Drury Lane Theatre had even older origins but was also razed more than once by fire. One building incarnation even included a vast rooftop reservoir, from which on opening night the water was released to flood the stage and so prove the quality of its fire precautions. Nevertheless at a later date it still went up in flames. Once a place of good repute, Drury Lane became one of London's darkest dens of poverty, vice and crime – as was Lewkner's Lane, now called Macklin Street. In Drury Lane as well,

near Long Acre, the plague first broke. One can go on and on.

Much of Covent Garden's activity of course centred on the piazza and the traditional market, mainly fruit, vegetables and flowers but also sometimes birds and ironware. The area started out quite simply as a convent garden which sold, at least in 1327, crops of apples, cherries and peas. In the mid-sixteenth century during the post-Reformation break-up of the religious estates, John Russell, first Earl of Bedford, became the owner. His new land holding stretched from St. Martin's Lane to Drury Lane and from Long Acre to a line behind houses then existing in the Strand. In 1631 the fourth earl bought a licence, an early form of planning permission, to develop part of Covent Garden and brought in Inigo Jones, who laid out the formal Italian-style piazza. Approached from what is now Wellington Street in the east, the space, some 420ft. by 316ft. led to the dramatic entrance to St. Paul's Church. However it was one which could never fulfil its potential, except as a backdrop for political hustings and more recently street theatre, because the ecclesiastical authorities insisted that the altar should be located as normal in this the eastern end. The south side of the piazza bordered onto the back of the fourth earl's garden. The other sides were let to speculative builders for the construction of grand colonnaded terraced homes. Three other streets, James, King and Henrietta, with obvious royal derivation, opened up into the new urban space with a sundial column marking its centre.

The gentry moving ever westwards from the overcrowded City arrived in goodly numbers. So did the market, mainly selling from stalls ranged against the garden wall. It was sufficiently well established by 1670 for the

fifth earl and his heirs to win by royal charter the continuing right all year round for the sale of fruit, flowers, roots and herbs. When Bedford House, its garden and the wall were redeveloped to form Southampton and Tavistock Streets, the market was pushed into the middle of the piazza and Southampton Street was gated to keep out carts.

However as the market grew in business and prosperity, so it became an increasingly uncomfortable, noisy, messy neighbour and the gentry packed up their furniture and left. They moved west again to Mayfair and St. James, their former homes gradually turning into places of public resort and pleasure – coffee houses, taverns hotels, brothels and Turkish baths, of which there were three – Haddock's, Lovejoy's and Lasinby's Hummums. Hummums, as it was called, was located in the Russell Chambers corner, now Tutton's and the entrance to the London Transport Museum. Best known of the three, it had at one time problems connected with the area's general merriment and vice and reopened in 1701 under new owners who claimed that 'persons may sweat and bathe in the cleanliest and be cupped after the newest manner'. 'No smoak or any noisome or stinking savors' were allowed. The charge was 5s 6d for one single person or 8s for two in one room. Ladies were not admitted.

Nearby was a clutch of coffee houses including Will's and Button's and an increasing number of hotels, some of which evolved from the coffee houses or hummums. Tavistock, Wood's, Gordon's, the Imperial, Richardson's, the Piazza, the Bedford and the Grand, now Archer House. This handsome King Street building was at first a minor private mansion, then rented to a perruke maker before it became the Grand Hotel in 1774. In part it stayed as such, serving song and supper entertainments, but part was used to house the new Royal Institute of British Architects from 1835. The Savage, Falstaff, New and National Sporting Clubs followed on, then George Monro, a fruiterer, and most recently a firm of advertising agents.



The new Flower Market 1872

Shops and small workshops abounded in the side streets – sedan chair maker and fan moulder as well as tailor, goldsmith and mercer. Always the Dukes of Bedford, as they had become, watched over their estate with care,



The last days of the Market



The new Market Building 1830

strengthening the covenants to ensure repairs, to prevent one tenant from annoying another, and by the 1860s heavily controlling change of use. Only with the duke's specific consent could leases be sold to a butcher, publican, cow-keeper, chimney sweep, pawnbroker, gold beater, bone burner, undertaker, coffin-maker, bookbinder or dealer in rags, birds or caricatures. Music, ball, billiard and auction rooms, shooting galleries, madhouses and school seminaries were totally banned.

Meanwhile the Bedford estate carried out a regular programme of renewal including the construction of new wider roads to replace narrow streets which disgorged traffic into the broad approaches to the piazza. In 1828 work started on a new market building designed by Charles Fowler with perimeter colonnade and lodges and looking very much as it does today, excepting that the two main aisles lacked cover. The roofs were added in 1875 and 1889. Florists

and fruit shops lined the central avenue and the west terrace, with two conservatories, provided a small nineteenth century garden centre on the first floor. In 1860 E.M. Barry's Floral Hall, a glass and ironwork structure, linked the piazza to Bow Street, its spacious dome-topped nave ending in two fan-shaped arcades. Intended as a flower market, it was used for foreign fruit from 1887, the flower dealers having preferred a location in the piazza's south-east corner, where from 1860 they operated under canvas. Their more permanent quarters, also glass and ironwork, were completed in 1872 and in 1904 the Jubilee Market was built with two trading floors to provide special accommodation for foreign flowers.

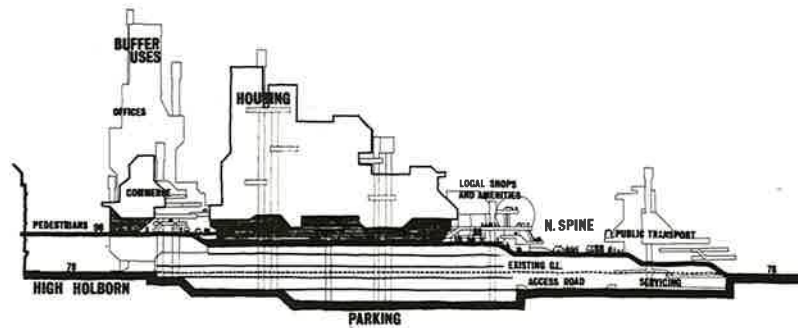
Towards the end of the nineteenth century public opinion built up against aristocratic control of services like markets and in Punch against the general mess of the Covent Garden 'mud salad market'. By then the Bedford estate

would have been content to hand over control but both the Metropolitan Board of Works and the City of London Corporation declined to take it over. In 1913 a £2,000,000 private option for sale was agreed, later taken over by a syndicate led by Sir Joseph Beecham, pill manufacturer and father of Sir Thomas, the conductor. The holdings were managed by a company called Covent Garden Estate, which tried again to sell off the market in 1920 to the London County Council. Finally it was sold to the new Government-backed Covent Garden Market Authority in 1962 for £3,925,000. As early as 1921 a government committee had decided the buildings were obsolete and quite unsuited to modern motor transport. The new authority decided to move, wavered over alternative sites and settled on Nine Elms in Battersea. This meant that a large area of London would require new owners and, with the surrounding area it had so long dominated, attention and a new city centre role.

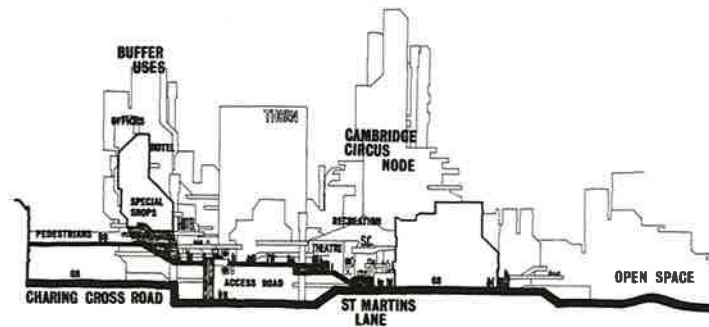


· IN DAYS LESS YORE ·

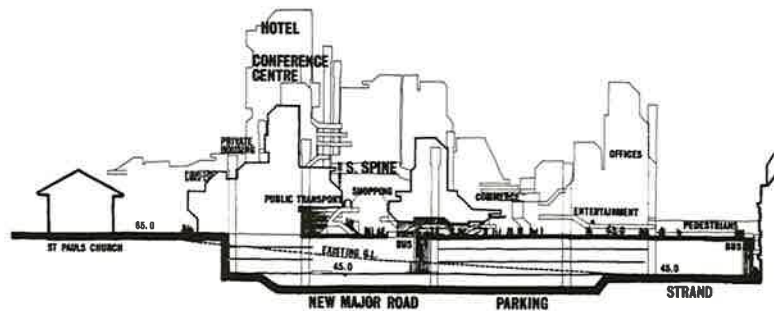




Section through High Holborn and North Spine



Section through Charing Cross Road and St. Martins Lane



Section through Strand and South Spine

They're luvverly! – £140m plans for Covent Garden'. That was the headline of the London Evening Standard story which appeared on November 6, 1968. 'Covent Garden's moving,' it began. 'London today gets its first look at the £140 millions garden that may one day grow (note that word "may") when the last brussel sprouts and bananas, aubergines and avocado pears have been sold and porters, trolleys and lorries have vanished across the river to their new home in Battersea.'

'It is a compulsive vision which blends the best of the old historic area with innovation on a grand scale.'

This was the plan which, little more than four years later, was to crash under the weight of popular protest but which, at the time did better than conform with current practice.

The article (under my name) described a visionary extension of the post-blitz new Jerusalem which architects, planners, developers and local politicians hoped then to create in the heart of the metropolis. The good earth or ground level would be given over largely to the car with monumental developments, the size of street blocks, rising from the sites of demolished terraced buildings. About two-thirds of an area approaching 100 acres was to be replaced.

The plan suggested the construction of two great parallel spines of new development with a character route of conservation left in the middle as historic filling. Detailed proposals included an international conference centre for 4,000 delegates, a large hotel, new theatres, shops, restaurants, offices, housing, schools, a park and, most noticeably, roads. The new framework included a four-lane highway parallel to the Strand, a low-level spine road in the north, the possibility of widening in Charing Cross Road and Shaftesbury Avenue, a link under Coutts Bank to allow for the removal of traffic from Trafalgar Square and the safeguarding of land west of Kingsway for the possible doubling its capacity.

This metropolitopia also featured a new system of elevated public transport, which could then be extended to other parts of the central area. It was expected that its structure would influence urban form and in itself create a major tourist attraction. High buildings would 'heighten dramatic situations and episodes, create landmarks and provide contrast.'

If such now seem the thankfully unrealistic as well as indigestible ingredients of the modern urban nightmare, megalomania unlimited or muggers' paradise, this planning feast, as prepared by the team of professionals set up by the Greater London Council and the two London



boroughs of Westminster and Camden, initially met with little cynicism, let alone opposition. The whole process of consultation was launched. The three councils gave it general blessing. Major property companies began assembling sites in preparation for the building boom which was to follow the market's move in 1972 or 1973. Land prices soared.

While it may now sound as if a great city was all too prepared to suffer monstrous urban rape, the atmosphere and times were very different. These were the last of the years in which Britain never had it so good. Expansion was the norm. The public sector had no idea it was enjoying a party, which politicians of both left and right were going to halt. Old buildings, except for monuments, had long been thought expendable and unworthy of the brave new world. Victoriana was overstyled, overbearing, overwhelming. Modern architecture could create the better society, planners were popular and members of

the public were regularly excited and convinced when yet another urban blueprint hit the press. Within town halls, the engineers reigned supreme as they planned bypasses, underpasses and inner ring roads for that great new household god, the motor car. They were planning positively for its growth and ready, willing and able to carve through city centre after city centre, eliminating homes, jobs and whole communities, to achieve that end.

In 1968 the urge to wipe clean the urban slate continued merrily. The City of London Corporation published detailed plans for the Barbican arts centre. In June a new plan for Piccadilly appeared with Eros promoted to an upper-level concourse and a 435ft skyscraper rising over the Criterion. In the meantime, Sir Hugh Wilson, architect-planner of Cumbernauld, later chairman of the Docklands Joint Committee and subsequently member of the London Docklands Development Corporation board, was working with his partner Lewis Womersley on a two-level reconstitution of Regent Street, complete with weather-protective glass canopy.

In the City, Lord Holford brought out ideas for a long-idle bomb site near St. Paul's Cathedral which would feature yet another sunken highway with overhead street for people on foot. In September Peter Palumbo first launched the Mies van der Rohe 290ft tower project at Mansion House with its new London square and underground shopping. Richmond Terrace and Norman Shaw's New Scotland Yard were both to vanish in favour of a new Home Office building and there was talk of yet more road schemes including a new Thames tunnel to get traffic out of Parliament Square. Of all these the Barbican Arts Centre alone rose up into the uneasy world of the pedestrian deck.

Nevertheless the tide was turning in favour of conservation, rehabilitation of terraced housing and public participation. Questions began to be raised about Covent Garden. Across the Atlantic in the New York Times Ada Louise Huxtable criticised the loss of so many historic buildings and streetscapes which 'Americans are beginning to wrap in cotton wool'. Much closer to home, within the Covent Garden team, Brian Anson, a senior planner was becoming increasingly concerned, angry and finally rebellious. Mr. Anson is one of the world's crusaders. His book, *I'll Fight You For It - The Struggle for Covent Garden*, tells his impassioned story of those times, as he tried to change aspects of the plan from within and then later more publicly from without. Contemptuous about those he describes as pseudo-radicals, he now says quite simply that he fought for London's Cockneys, the local families of long standing: 'It was a freedom struggle about people's rights to their land. I don't think it's about environment at all.'

In the early years Covent Garden planning came under a special joint committee set up by the GLC with Westminster and Camden, the two very different boroughs between which the area is uncomfortably split. An alliance between the two Camden Tories and all the Labour representatives put the Conservative Alan Greengross from Camden in the chair until 1970. Then the GLC created a new joint development committee on which the two boroughs could still sit but over which the GLC had full control. The GLC had decided that Covent Garden was of strategic importance and that one authority would speed and simplify the planning process for developers. Camden was infuriated and refused to play any part for a very long time. The GLC continued to back an increasingly unpopular plan, as it did the three

expensive rings of motorway set out in the new Greater London Development Plan.

The very idea of physical change and development upsets people everywhere – in city, town or village. These days, articulate protest groups spring up in instant response, often totally unrepresentatives of the silent majority. However in 1971 the revolt which gathered strength in Covent Garden really was popular, encompassed all levels of the community and encapsulated a host of issues of concern to a much wider audience.

Perhaps they took note because Covent Garden is written deep in the English historic and romantic subconscious – porters humping crates of fruit and vegetables, flower girls, nobs in top hats at the opera, Nell Gwynn, Hogarth, Dickens, Boswell, *My Fair Lady*. Certainly the fact that its very name triggered off such associations and the flavour of the metropolis all over the country meant that the media felt able to cover the subject with some regularity instead of pushing it aside, as too often happens, as being of local rather than national significance.

However, while the traditional market was the community which represented Covent Garden to most outsiders – whose move was creating the opportunity for this massive change – it was the hidden community which began to emerge as the body of equal interest and force. People who unusually for central London had lived as neighbours for four generations or more and who for whom Covent Garden was home. People who were running small businesses of long standing. People of more recent origins, who had chosen to live or work in the area because it was compact, convenient, full of old buildings and the spirit of city life, past as well as



Roads and Spines 1968

present. People who quite simply were horrified at the destruction of a living and working community and so many buildings that were good, shabby and rotten though the fabric might seem, for the sake of a modern concrete kingdom without soul.

Apart from Mr Anson, several key figures emerged, particularly Jim Monahan, then only a student at the Architectural Association, who knocked on door after door throughout the area to inform and recruit support. An architect active in the area to this day, he admits his actions were arrogant but adds that the case had to be made and 'perhaps only youth could say it'.

'It was Jim who alerted me to the situation that something of a serious nature was happening,' explains the Reverend Austen Williams, then vicar of St Martin-in-the-Fields. It is not very often that a vicar, let alone a Royal chaplain, steps down from the pulpit to attend raucous public meetings, preside over a new community association and even stand in the witness box at a major public inquiry.

A huge public meeting was held on April Fool's Day in 1971 and a mass of others joined the fray – Christina Smith, founder of Goods and Chattels in Neal Street, Simon Pembroke, a lecturer in Greek at London University, David Bieda then of Street Aid, now running the locally-based Central London Youth Project, whose building in Southampton Street would have vanished had the plan gone through, as would that of Rules restaurant, whose owner John Wood became deeply involved. Old Covent Garden families like the Toomeys and Driscolls. The list was long. The Covent Garden Community was set up with the following aims: to sustain pressure at a political level against the plan; to suggest proposals for a gradual



renewal in keeping with the area's character based on public participation; and to protect the rights of people living, studying, working or with businesses. 'It may sometimes appear an emphasis is made on preserving buildings because this is an area where positive action shows,' the constitution comments. 'However the association is concerned with people living in the city and particularly the needs, rights and welfare of poorer people.' Street representatives were appointed, demonstrations organised, a meeting held in front of St Paul's – the actors' – church, posters stuck on buildings scheduled for the bulldozer. There was even one of Hitler saying 'He could not destroy Covent Garden. Don't let the GLC'.

In April Coutts Bank in the south-west corner of the area forced one of London's more extraordinary public inquiries. Owner of the triangular listed building with pepperpot corners, it wanted to rebuild and the GLC were insisting that the proposals allowed for the insertion of one of Covent Garden's new roads. Coutts objected and successfully fought off this idea. The final result has been the preservation of the pepperpots and the insertion of a glass-fronted banking hall instead as a successful blend of old and new.

In July the 42-day Covent Garden inquiry began with a positive regiment of witnesses lined up for the verbal battle. Press interest soon waned but not that of local people, who found the court-like procedure totally addictive. It also strengthened friendships and working relationships between a number of very different people who had only recently met under the threat posed to their community and interests. Poet laureate, Sir John Betjeman, insisted on appearing on behalf of Rules restaurant to say that a place used by actors and other famous people acquired invisible

atmosphere just as much as churches absorbed something of those who come inside to pray. 'The village of Covent Garden needs a champion against the developer and that champion should be the GLC,' he said. It took a little longer but Sir John effectively did get his wish.

Even when the inquiry was over, the battle for establishment minds as well as hearts continued. Simon Pembroke, the London University lecturer, originally became involved because he felt he had to do something, not just 'retreat into classical antiquity and the little world I am supposed to inhabit where all dates are BC unless otherwise specified'. Having heard that Haslemere Estates was including part of the proposed new road network in a development at the top of Drury Lane and worried that the impact of the opposition might be lost in local disagreements and personality conflicts, he became as one obsessed. He analysed the GLC's own daily transcripts and produced a 105-page detailed assessment of the evidence which was dispatched to the Department of the Environment in the autumn of 1972.

Meanwhile the Countess of Dartmouth, daughter of romantic novelist Barbara Cartland and since she has become Countess Spencer, step-mother of the even more romantic Princess of Wales, had become chairman of the Covent Garden Committee. A politician to her establishment fingertips, but one with principles and well versed in public relations, she obviously found herself uneasy when faced with the rebellious community under the official leadership of a Royal chaplain. She cannot have greatly enjoyed having her Mayfair home laid siege by angry demonstrators in January 1972. By the summer she was to invite a number of the opposition to lunch at County Hall complete with formal municipal silver and cut glass.

'Everybody was very angry,' comments Noel Tobin, who controls stage lighting at the Royal Opera House and has raised a young family in the area. 'It was not a moment for eating. She was keen on conservation. God knows who thought of appointing her. Soon after that she resigned. She deserves a medal in Covent Garden. OK she's an up-market lady but she tried in her way.'

Appointed to quell the opposition and reassert the political and intellectual authority of the planners, her resignation in July 1982 hit the headlines. Her letter to the GLC's Tory leader, now Lord Plummer, was precise: 'No individuals or bodies who represent the general public have supported us and I have felt increasingly that our proposals are out of date and out of tune with public opinion which fears that the area will become a faceless concrete jungle. I am unable to work for a project in which I no longer believe and which could do unnecessary and irreparable damage to a historic part of London.' Two other Tories also resigned.

Olympic swimmer, Robert Mitchell, took her place. 'I don't want to get labelled I am pro the 1968 plan but I do think it was a much better plan than it gets the credit for,' he says now adding that by 1972 the massive road proposals had already been jettisoned. But the drama was building up behind the scenes. At the Department of the Environment Geoffrey Rippon had taken over from Peter Walker and about a month before the decision it was rumoured that somebody was going around the area looking at individual buildings. The Covent Garden chairman thought it must be a joke. Not a bit – the somebodies included the Secretary of State and the permanent secretary. The inquiry verdict came on 15 January 1973 just after Robert Mitchell was temporarily forced out of action by a heart attack.

The decision was exceedingly clever. Although the principle of comprehensive development was approved, as was the proposed increase in housing, there were a number of major modifications including the rejection of the roads and the suggested increases in hotel space and shopping. In addition, while requesting development of the same scale and character as the existing fabric, the

Environment Secretary made a move of fascinating finesse. He added more than 250 buildings to the list of historic and architectural merit and since they were scattered like confetti across the area, effectively spiked the prospect of blockbuster development. 'Almost the best thing I ever did – saving Covent Garden,' says Geoffrey Rippon today. 'A lot of things like legislation are soon forgotten.'



Ideas for the Piazza 1971

· PLANNING THE NEW GARDEN ·



Forum in session

Eight days later the details of the newly listed buildings emerged including Rules, pubs with literary associations, structures with quite plain frontages but interest inside, such as the premises of a former coachmaker and a London board school. They affected 42 different streets in the 96 acres. Mick Malone, an architect-planner from private practice who was brought in because of his knowledge of companies dealing on the scale of towers and ziggurats, remembers the announcement. Together with the then team leader Ron Reynolds, he went round looking at the additions to the list and then they stuck more than 250 markers on a map. 'They were in an incredible state,' he says. 'Gradually the hysteria grew.'

This decision, combined with the oil crisis and more important the subsequent property crash, ended the intensity of development pressure. Land values had soared in the late 1960s as companies moved in to reap the rewards of the draft plan and large-scale highly profitable redevelopment. In the past, such plans had gone through, if not on the nod, at least relatively unscathed. This time the spotlighting of the 250 buildings had lanced their ballooning hopes, even before the market generally collapsed. Those who survived could certainly not afford to pin their faith on appeal to central government for permission to demolish such newly found architectural or historic treasures for modern blocks, particularly as it was a Conservative minister who had conjured this fistful of aces from the bureaucratic hat as a means of curbing excessive change. They were therefore faced with a situation where for example they might have borrowed to pay £4,000,000 an acre to assemble a site which, because of the crash and severely reduced development potential, was worth perhaps £750,000. The effect of having that sort of

carpet pulled from under their feet lasted a very long time.

But it gave the GLC politicians and professionals time to learn how to work with the community, begin to cultivate the new garden and come up with an agreed workable plan which would create new activity once the market area died. It was no easy task to start all over again in an atmosphere of total mistrust. While Mick Malone, who was not involved in the inquiry can look back and laugh, there are some people from both sides whose Covent Garden campaign scars are even today too thinly healed for comfort. Members of the GLC team felt beaten although the principle of comprehensive development had emerged unscathed and as professionals they had been working to a brief. Older planners brought up in the post-war paternalistic climate did not take too kindly to direct input from outsiders, often equally professional and believed by the general public to be more sensitive and caring of the area's underlying character. 'Only the people who hadn't got the responsibility had the ideas,' says one who moved on. Others accepted the change and got on with the job. That they returned to the drawingboard, tackled deep-rooted hostility, planned with and for the local people, Londoners and others further afield and in 13 years have achieved massive acceptable change, increased prosperity and improved standards of living for those who live in the community is to their great credit as well as the undoubted advantage of the area and London.

It was however to be a long torturous argumentative haul. The opposition was gleeful and could not immediately accept that these political and professional leopards had changed their spots. Nor did they all want the same sort of ends, let alone means. 'The original pressure groups had very strong views,'

says Brian Sweby, who was involved as an estate agent in the area. 'On the one side people would say you could only have housing which is socially acceptable (ie council) and that Covent Garden should be for the people, on the other side a realistic understanding that you had to get money to do these projects. You've got to have money and understanding of business or you make a lot of noise and you don't get anywhere.'

It undoubtedly helped create a better and different atmosphere when Labour won control of the GLC in May 1973, an election in which the numerous Homes Before Roads candidates confirmed the public antipathy towards unnecessary urban upheaval. Tom Ponsonby, former secretary of the Fabian Society and later to become London Tourist Board chairman, a member of the House of Lords and now the Opposition chief whip, took over the Covent Garden chair and the delicate task of promoting peace, public participation and a new plan. Together with other committee members he presided over a series of public meetings, which at first were standing room only and exceedingly hostile. Slowly both numbers and vituperation decreased. All the time, he insisted that he would not impose decisions about types of consultation, that it was up to local people, not him or the GLC, to decide on the relationship they wished to establish.

A working party was suggested and over the months ideas were evolved by a group which included residents, business people, GLC professionals and politicians. Its chairman John Wood of Rules helped bridge the gaps in understanding and interest between the different sections of the community. Although he was obviously interested in and had fought for the future of his business, his concern for the needs of local people, in particular housing,

had won him their respect. Certainly they had a good case to make. Covent Garden then boasted, although that is scarcely the right word, some of London's most rundown tenements. According to a GLC survey in 1966, about 2,800 people were living in some 1,660 homes of which only 55 per cent had their own bathroom and 23 per cent their own lavatory. About one-quarter were council tenancies, another 10 per cent being owned by the Peabody Trust. A body of Victorian philanthropic origins, some of its local property still featured communal sinks and toilets on the open stairs, which were not merely inadequate but were often unwillingly shared with local dossers and tramps. It was not surprising that some sections of the local population simply looked on the market's move and the GLC's interest as a belated opportunity to improve and increase the housing stock and provide community facilities. But the future of such an important area had to be considered on a wider metropolitan basis as well. Somehow the conflicts of interest had to be resolved.

'The main problem with these protest meetings is packing,' says Mr Wood now. 'You don't get a truly representative result. The area is made up of many many interests and those interests should be balanced. One should know very different points of view and the only way I thought that could be done was a register. God almighty it went on night after night about three nights a week. I declined to take votes.'

GLC officers including Geoffrey Holland, who became team leader in April 1974, took part and a new form of political body emerged – a sort of urban parish council with specific representation from all sections of the community including the different types of tenants, home and business property owners, local employers and employees of every kind,

including shops, restaurants, offices, the theatre and public organisations. Residents automatically qualified for the vote and so did all those who worked there, if they took the trouble to register.

Some activists withdrew from the discussions early on, others stayed with the process. Lord Ponsonby finally won support for this specialised democratic body, the first election was held in 1974 and the first chairman was the Reverend Austen Williams, a sensible choice in view of the impartiality needed to balance continuing conflicts of interest and belief between the residents and those in business. And conflicts there were. Within a short time the community association decided that no member of its executive could also stand for the Forum, which led to the resignation of a number of people including their chairman, none other than the vicar of St Martin-in-the-Fields, who now wished to work with the new elected body.

The actual Forum consisted and still consists of 30 elected members with nine representatives from each of the main groups and three property owners. Elections are held every two years and over the years candidates have included people who work at the Royal Opera House, Pineapple Dance, the City Literary Institute, the Market, bookshops, advertising, graphics, architecture, restaurants and the church. As well as regular meetings in the St Martin's vestry and the right to attend GLC Covent Garden meetings, it has a number of committees covering different aspects of community life and one which filters planning applications. With a style of democracy which enforces discussion between potentially antagonistic economic and social interests, but which must perforce eventually be reconciled in compromise in any city state, the Forum had and has its denigrators. Nevertheless it provides lessons for direct

positive involvement in areas of change such as the inner city.

Meanwhile the market was on the move – it left in November 1974 – and Geoffrey Holland had to get a new plan under way. It was an excessively slow process but one which moved a step at a time and logically and gradually advanced from principles to priorities, then resources and finally the implications in detail for particular sites. The prospect of a convention centre was lost in very early days and a broad policy statement published at the end of December 1973 emphasised the opportunity for new rented homes and small business combined with conservation. 'Covent Garden now presents a magnificent opportunity for the creation of a lively community in the centre of London where people can live, work and play,' it stated.

To talk to those involved in the lengthy process is to get the impression that everyone – the democratically elected members of the first Forum, members of the more activist community association, indeed members of the GLC's professional team and politicians – wrote the plan. To achieve this joint ownership and responsibility for what became Holy Writ involved hard work, patience and a degree of local involvement without precedent in London. Their knowledge, interest and expertise combined with the personal passion Covent Garden so often evokes drove them to discuss, argue, write, question and finally in large part agree. For the GLC officers it was an extraordinarily enlightening experience which few planners ever have and of which even today's community architecture, with the Prince of Wales as patron, is but a shadow. So many key people were involved. 'You wondered how am I going to explain myself to Christina, to Jim,' Geoffrey Holland now. 'It's a terrific

discipline – you are actually planning for people, individual people. You actually get to know the people.'

The second half of 1975 saw a series of 13 policy reports prepared for yet more public discussion and Jean Merriton, who was tragically killed in 1985 in a car crash in Crete, took over from Lord Ponsonby. By May 1976, the GLC produced a policy options report which took on board a number of outside amendments. The draft plan and detailed feasibility studies for individual sites emerged in June and still the local participation and involvement continued with further reports from the Forum and community association. So far as the sites with the potential for change were concerned, local meetings were held to include everyone with an interest, not merely as owners or agents but also with jobs which might, or might not, be affected.

In October 1976 the GLC approved the plan and a local planning inquiry followed at which both the Forum and community association appeared as counter objectors. In other words they objected so that they could object to the objectors, a new phenomenon in the planning process. The plan was finally adopted in January 1978 nearly 10 years after the publication of the original plan and five years after Geoffrey Rippon's classic decision. Like the one which was torn to shreds by public opinion, it aimed to increase the resident population to between 5,000 and 6,000. The central market building was still to be converted into some form of galleria and indeed work had begun on this important transformation in 1975. However the emphasis overall had switched from a large amount of redevelopment to conservation combined with a sensitive mix of small-scale use.

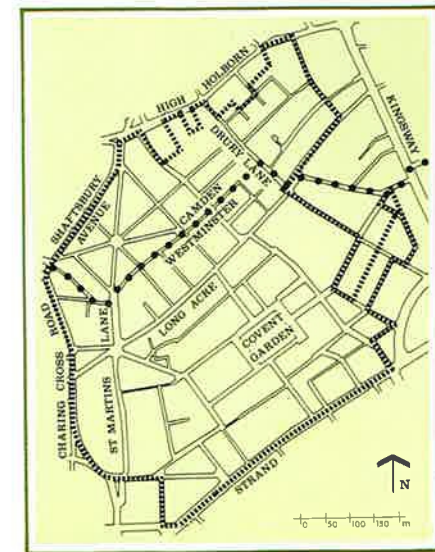
So far as housing was concerned, traditional high city densities were adopted against current social and financial trends. Half the homes were to be big enough for families and residents and their grown-up children, who had been forced to move and wanted to return. They were given rehousing guarantees. Many have done so. Other housing objectives included a possible housing action area to improve older property around the Seven Dials.

Office provision was to relate to central London's needs but with an emphasis on small suites. Light industry – and this could include rehearsal space and sound-proofed recording studios – was to be encouraged but interestingly, given the amount of vacant warehousing, storage has definitely not, as was the case with discount shopping. Showrooms were subject to stringent controls including an insistence on a proper window display to enliven and lighten, if not enlighten, the street. Shops, generally in favour, were not normally to be changed to showrooms or even restaurants but new cafes and restaurants would normally be allowed on the so-called theatre or entertainment route between St Martin's Lane and the Aldwych. Controls over nightclubs, discotheques and restaurants with music and dance licences were even stricter. The infiltration of Soho in the form of massage parlours, saunas, strip clubs, casinos and gaming clubs would be fought. Indoor games such as bingo and snooker were all right within limits but not street arcades with slot machines. Museums and art galleries were acceptable, but only if the premises or site were not suitable for housing, industry, shops or offices.

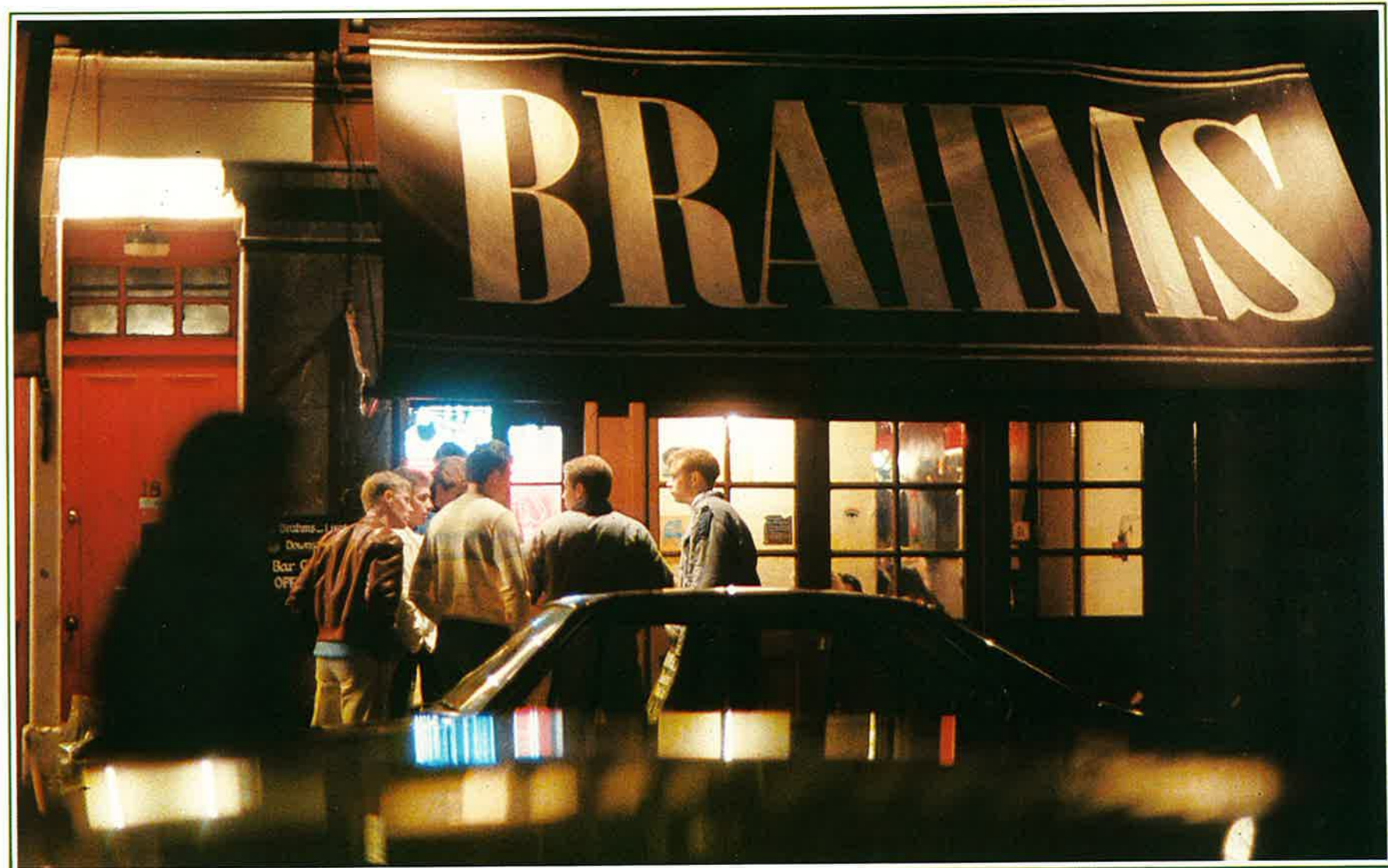
Since Covent Garden had lost about 6,000 jobs in print and a further 3,000 connected with the

market, some form of new employment was essential and entertainment and tourism were accepted as potential sources of investment and jobs for the area's economic regeneration. Local shops were to be provided within the council's own development. The conservation section was quite tart about the dangers of careless conversion particularly the creation of open-plan offices across adjoining buildings. These showed up all too easily with continuous strip ceiling lights and clashed with the individual facades on the street. If somewhat larger organisations could not respect the character of Covent Garden, they could go somewhere else.

When finally published, the signature on the foreword was that of Alan Greengross, the former chairman of the joint consortium responsible for the original plan and now a member of the GLC, which had in 1977 swung from Labour to Conservative control. On his appointment he went carefully through the draft and quite simply said there was no need for further change. It was a crucially important decision because it gave Tory backing to the social objectives, especially the housing element, and created a climate in which, while there might be minor changes of emphasis as one party took over from another, party politics largely yielded place to the interest of Covent Garden. Its spell hooked the politicians as well.



· THE BEGINNING OF NEW GROWTH ·



Brahms and Liszt

In the intervening period, while politicians, planners and local people had been carefully stitching together the detailed pattern for the future, it was not only ideas about what make for the good city which had radically changed. In 1973 Schumacher published *Small is Beautiful*, the oil crisis occurred and subsequently the property market crashed with bankruptcy for some companies, painful and long convalescence for others and distinct chariness thereafter on the part of banks and other funding institutions except of gold-plated low-risk schemes.

Covent Garden did not fall into this category, mainly because so many concerns had been caught out when their expectations of development in the proposed metropolitopia vanished in the new policy of conservation. 'Any business starting up in this area had enormous difficulties getting funds to carry out developments or improvements,' says Brian Sweby. 'The institutions put a lot of money in. They all burnt their fingers. So Covent Garden became a dirty word.'

On the other hand, the lack of pressure from just those organisations which deal in sums and risks beyond most people's comprehension made much more feasible the growth of a Covent Garden in which individual effort and a more innovative development approach could flourish. Struggling architects and designers found themselves able to set up in old property and eke out a living over some difficult years. Also lured by cheap rents, others set up new, sometimes offbeat, shops and restaurants in streets which were off the beaten track but not so far, in city centre terms, as to make diversion difficult if the word should spread. Simultaneously the GLC encouraged temporary use of some of its old buildings and sites, sometimes secure in the knowledge gained from

the ongoing process of participation and consultation that the temporary would stand an excellent chance of surviving into permanence.

While planning all too often has involved words, ideas and visions unrelated to economic reality, in Covent Garden the planning process was now highly practical, the GLC acting as a good lord of the manor. Its interests were twofold. As property owner it looked to long-term profitability from sensible estate development and management. More important, as trustee for the people of London, it was responsible for achieving new economic, social and physical vitality for 96 acres in the heart of the capital city and, at the same time, ensuring tangible improvements for the people for whom Covent Garden is quite simply their home.

It is difficult now to imagine what the area was like both immediately before and after the move of the long-established market to Nine Elms, Battersea. Lorries and vans jammed the narrow streets. Wooden trays and boxes of fruit and vegetables and flowers spilled out of market buildings and a good many others nearby. Porters humped produce throughout the night, the early morning hours and well into the day. The atmosphere was noisy, earthy, a quintessential part of the London scene as its produce was to daily life. One day in November 1974, the scene bustled. The next it had gone. And the GLC, for some £6,000,000, gradually acquired deeds of ownership of a motley collection of buildings in and around the piazza including the central market, the flower market, the Jubilee Hall and Bedford Chambers, which had been rebuilt at the turn of the century complete with colonnade to reflect the original seventeenth century concept of Inigo Jones. This considerable ownership of land provided the key to unlock profitable regeneration of quality and variety.





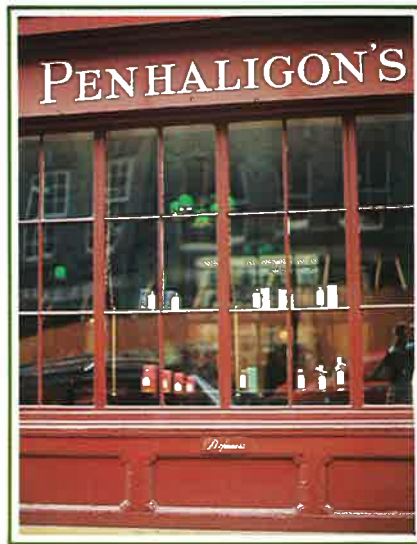
Without constant care and new planting, gardens all too quickly become at first unkempt, next overgrown with weeds and then filled with decay, if not death. Buildings and cities are much the same and in this particular garden, lifeless buildings in largely deserted streets became all too noticeable. At such times and in such places, action and faith are all important both to those who live and work within the neighbourhood and those who might do either – or provide the necessary investment. Urban renewal is perforce so slow that it is all too easy for the professional prophets of doom, the doubting Thomas or the mere nitpicking critic to sow rumours of failure in the face of apparent inactivity.

In Covent Garden, the GLC set out with a will to turn the tide. Detailed planning and the renovation of the central market building were bound to take time, as were major schemes

such as the conversion of the flower market into two museums for London Transport and the theatre. But that still left properties which could be let short term at least and begin to attract people back in to fill the void.

Response to advertisements for tenants for GLC property was light and just about nil with regard to local services, such as the butcher, baker and the modern electrical equivalent of the candlestick maker, for which the community was pressing. However early arrivals included the Inter-Varsity Club, the Rock Garden and Tutton's restaurants in the piazza and Penhaligon's, the perfumier, and another restaurant called Rumours in Wellington Street. In Russell Street, the bookshop where Dr Johnson first met Boswell became a modern coffee house, while Brahm's and Liszt opened as a highly successful wine bar on the other side of the road to reinforce the nucleus of a new





catering quarter to serve opera and theatre clientele at night and a new lunchtime market which actively created further interest in regeneration. Graphic designers would invite their clients to explore new territory and the latter would emerge in happy bucolic haze, aware not only of their host's charm and skills, but the convenience, character and potential of the area as a location for themselves. Apocryphal perhaps but smaller advertising, computing and publishing firms did follow the lead of the photographic and design studios and helped to create the interlocking network of businesses which add spice and idiosyncrasy to the local ambience. The single buildings which make up the normal streets of Covent Garden were a useful size and the ground-floor shops, as they let, unwittingly helped establish the beginnings of a strong major shopping area.

Individuals were active in this and other fields. In Neal Street, Christina Smith began to build up her Covent Garden manor, which started with Goods and Chattels Chinese imports and office and restaurant space for the as yet unknighthed Terence Conran. In Neal's Yard, a wholefood cooperative attracted bean and peanut butter aficionados despite its well concealed location. In Floral Street, the Dance Centre and later on Pineapple Dance in Langley Street set up a different form of the health business in

former warehouses and added to Covent Garden's growing reputation as well as their own, as people surged into the area for classes in fitness, tap, jazz and ballet. More people were regularly drawn into the area by the Jubilee Market, which opened in 1975 and over time established a role in the speciality street shopping scene with bric-a-brac on Mondays, crafts on Saturdays and Sundays and a general market trading from Tuesday to Friday, with food, clothes and popular paraphernalia.

Meanwhile the community association was pushing as hard as ever on behalf of local residents. Perhaps it was a question of personalities but bygones were not buried for everyone and trust was certainly not yet ready to enter in. In any event, under its imaginative and energetic helmsman, Jim Monahan, it continued to act as agent provocateur, needling the GLC, awakening media interest, even calling out the district auditor to investigate the decision to convert the upper floors of James Street near the piazza to offices instead of housing. If this was creative tension at its most extreme, there was a certain amount of more constructive competition, for example when it instigated the area's first new short-life housing and then continued with a substantial conversion programme of longer-term improvements.



The Japanese Garden — Long Acre

The community association has made a number of other direct contributions to the local quality of life. 'There's a great deal of difference between complaining about what's mooted for the area and actually doing something about it,' says Jim Monahan now. 'We were willing and able and did demonstrate ourselves capable.' Despite a shoestring for income, the association set up the local community centre, a shop and the Seven Dials Housing Cooperative. It joined with other central London groups to form a law centre, published a local handbook of tenant advice and still manages the joint housing allocations committee which was set up to ensure that Covent Garden residents, present and past, got their share of the new homes. The community association raised about £80,000 to enable the Jubilee Hall to be made safe and suitable for temporary use from 1978 for local indoor sports. It provided back-up for individuals like Fred Collins, whose family has run a Covent Garden shop for 150 years, to create the community gardens which became such an enjoyable if temporary feature of the local scene. Once someone started one, other helpers simply appeared. 'If you lived in Covent Garden, that's how you spent your weekends,' says Maggie Pinhorn, artistic director of Alternative Arts, another enterprise which had local origins. 'People came from all over London and gave things. These community gardens were one of the most beautiful

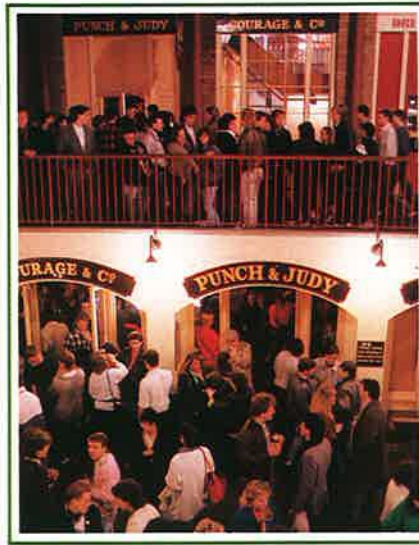
processes I – and anyone else – went through. Because they were there for a short time, there was a special happiness in them.' She even had her wedding reception in one. The gardens have nearly all gone but Alternative Arts flourishes still, having first brought back open-air entertainment to Covent Garden in 1975 when the portico of St Paul's once again became the focus of street theatre for which the area has since become renowned. The first performance was *Mud Salad* by the Covent Garden Community Theatre, yet another new locally-based initiative. After 10 years, Alternative Arts, an all-woman team, handles artists and entertainers from all over the world, organises festivals and generally contributes to piazza vitality.

· THE MAKING OF THE MARKET ·



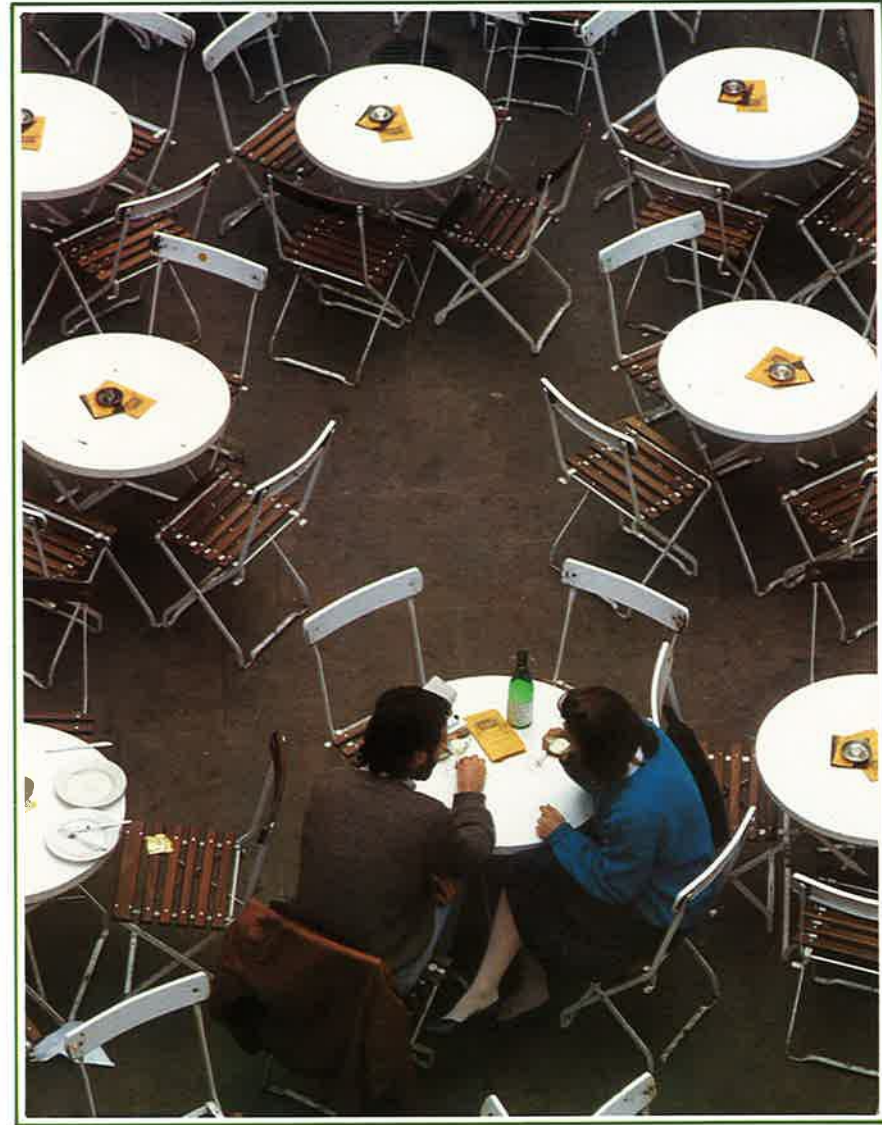


I literally have had an American say to me: "How much will it cost – I want to buy it", says Rennie Turner, GLC manager of The Market, Covent Garden, with genuine satisfaction. He continues the story. 'It's not for sale,' was his rejoinder. 'I want to buy it and move it to America,' the visitor went on. 'You mean like London Bridge?' asked Rennie Turner, who was formerly a Royal Air Force wing commander in charge of a fighter station. A joke perhaps, but the market manager believes the transatlantic shopper did have the necessary clout and financial wherewithal and the episode confirms the confidence with which Sir Horace Cutler, Tory GLC leader, opened the building on June 18, 1980. 'I foresee The Market becoming as famous throughout the world as the Tower, Buckingham Palace, the Houses of Parliament or 10 Downing Street,' he told those invited to the celebration. Since that day people have constantly flowed into the two great halls



and the central colonnade to wander around, shop, bargain, eat, drink, make merry, listen to the buskers and above all else absorb the vitality, watch the world go by and know they are playing a part in the living theatre of the street. Here there is always expectation of the unexpected. It is a place of public resort, for those on holiday and those with but a holi-hour or holi-morn.

For the GLC and therefore London at large, Covent Garden has also proved an outstanding commercial success. For an overall investment of about £4,600,000, its current estimated capital value is at least £17,000,000 and gross annual income exceeds £1,000,000. The first figure includes more than £2,800,000 building costs which were particularly high because of the peculiar difficulties associated with a historic structure designed for totally different use.





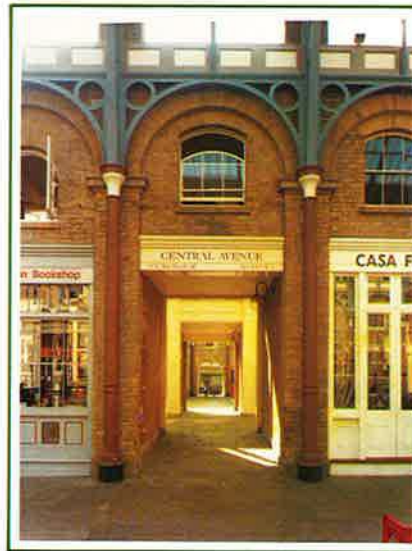
When The Market first opened, however, the GLC team had absolutely no idea whether the people really would come that day, the next or the days, weeks and years to follow. For 12 years, the planners' dream had remained much the same. But it is one thing to talk of the opportunity for new cafe life in a historic ambience, quite another to create it, since this depends on careful orchestration, not just to convert a handsome old building to new use but also to find the right magnets and operators to attract the crowds. Nowadays a market has but to think of removal from a Victorian setting for conservationists, city visionaries and the world of real estate to produce sketches and feasibility studies of just such speciality leisure shopping centres, often with the description 'Covent Garden style'. In 1968 and the years which followed, the situation was very different. The idea of festival shopping, often in some formerly derelict industrial building on a

waterfront, was not yet seen as a formula for inner-city regeneration. Ghiardelli Square in San Francisco was an international success and the Rouse development of the old Faneuil Market Hall in Boston was under way. However its concentration on snack eating and drinking did not then seem a practicable model for the British. 'We found it incredibly difficult at the time to describe what we wanted to do,' says Geoffrey Holland, the GLC's team leader.



It was not only the proposed content or use which presented problems but also the building itself. Originally the general intention was both to restore and embroider with new construction but this approach shifted to one of such scholarly restoration that there was a very real danger of removal of the glass roofs and with them protection from the elements. When Lady Spencer was chairman, the committee actually agreed that they should be taken off, the historical perfectionists persuading those of possibly more practical mind of the importance of giving Londoners the opportunity to enjoy Fowler's setpiece building in its original form. It took some years in Victorian times for the market men, exposed as they were to the vagaries of British weather, to win their campaign to get the roofs put on – and then only one at a time. It looked as if its was going to take no time at all to whip them off so that visitors to the new Covent Garden could, regardless of wind and rain, admire the original nineteenth century concept.





Fortunately the question of the roofs returned for political decision in 1973. Tension between the GLC team (for retention) and the GLC historic building experts (for removal) was running high. 'We plastered the walls of the room with beautiful photographs of gallerias in Milan and arcades in Leeds,' says Geoffrey Holland today. The historic buildings board including Sir John Betjeman turned up convinced it would be sacrilege to leave them on. There was no political party line, the vote was free and Lord Ponsonby as chairman cast his vote in favour of retention to win a climactic and climatic victory.

Another major decision concerned the network on storage 'cells' below ground. 'We even discussed filling them all with concrete,' remembers Robert Mitchell, who switched from the removal to the retention camp in the battle of roofs. In the event, it was decided to open them out in the southern hall to create an extra level. Again this now seems an obvious decision in terms of activity and creation of place and space. It also considerably helped financial viability.

A tremendous amount of research went into the style, content and choice of tenants for The Market, a job for which Tim Wachter, a surveyor and deputy team leader, was basically responsible with Donaldson's, managing agents for the highly successful Brent Cross shopping centre, brought into advise on marketing and management. About 150,000 people were reckoned to be working within 15 minute's walk, a radius which includes Piccadilly Circus as well as parts of Holborn and Fleet Street. Permanent residents however amounted only to 10,000, less even than the 13,000 estimate for hotel and hostel beds. Within five minutes of The Market there were already nearly 300 shops and more than 160 restaurants, cafes, pubs and wine bars and the GLC itself was in the process of creating about 90 more, about 40 of them in the new development, which with its 42,000 sq. ft. of



selling space just about compared with the larger supermarkets of the time. Not only would the well-known high street chain store names not find the shape and size of space they liked, but it was positively decided their inclusion would not help create a place which would attract sufficient custom including tourists from home and overseas. Restaurants were doing well in this respect in Covent Garden and eating, if not American-style snack eating,

featured more strongly than it normally would in a conventional shopping centre. As for the rest, it was to be specialised yet integrated, with types of shops chosen for their contribution to the overall effect, even if this meant somewhat lower rents. The lack of car parking also had to be considered in the choice. More than 1,000 applications were received, first-timers eliminated, a mass of shop premises visited incognito and the selection finally made. 'There





was no way you could make it full of local shops for local people,' says Tim Wacher, who hoped to create something new in London, a kind of British Left Bank with all the zest and life of the Pompidou Centre.

The Apple Market with its rows of 40 craft stalls came about at least in part to fill up what might otherwise have seemed a somewhat barren, possibly windswept space. Occasional visitors may find it somewhat baffling when they return



to repeat the purchase of a hand-painted silk cushion, a particular style of knitwear, pottery with burnished glaze, intricately carved toy or other created object. A few stallholders are there more often but the vast majority is present for just one day a week. Monday is reserved for antiques and bric-a-brac.

To maintain standards and stop more generally available or grotty goods lowering The Market's reputation, a special vetting panel has now been established to approve new applicants and their wares. They then join the waiting list for a regular daily slot or more probably take up the small number of last-minute casual vacancies. Both Forum and community association are represented as well as crafts and other specialists. Generally the stallholders, who pay £12 a day, have to set up by 11am and stay until about 7pm. Hopeful casuals get their names down early for the daily 10.30am draw, with Rennie Turner drawing out the first name and that person drawing the next. There is an automatic system of third time lucky in that anyone who fails twice in a row can pick a day the following week and be assured of a place.

Very few make their fortunes but there is a delightful ambience of bonhomie, camaraderie and creative satisfaction. 'The nucleus of the market have stuck out through bad weather and the colder months,' says Sue West, whose lace-trimmed cushions lie glamorously scattered under a white umbrella, unfurled and dangling delicate snowy artificial flowers. 'We're aware we can't just opt out and come back when it's the cream situation' The Market is their livelihood and many choose this way of life because they can continue to create, which is often somewhat solitary, yet regularly enjoy the stimulation of the market and their customers.

The busking at the other end of the north hall brings yet more animation and fun, which is good for trade as well as personal enjoyment. Tim Wachter, himself a jazz trombonist, and Rennie Turner carried out the original auditions. Nowadays performers, who may be magicians, jugglers and dancers as well as straightforward musicians, get a six-month licence which allows them two hours a week. Once again there is a draw, this time on a weekly basis, with those who turn up able to pick their times as their names emerge from the hat.

Quite naturally there have been changes since The Market opened. The location was unsuitable for a pine shop. The flower shop closed down and has been taken over by the subsidiary of another shop already there, but for the sale of accessories rather than their existing range of goods. Trading under another name, there is no question of domination by one name or style. A craft shop has turned into mechanical toys, a shoe shop now deals in lace, souvenirs have been replaced by Edwina Carroll, an existing trader who sells British goods and whose door is often temporarily locked to enable customers already inside to browse in peace. The newsagent has been sold, a shoe shop was taken over by a similar specialist, Penguin's now run the other book shop for children, the Curry Shop has arrived to sell spices and a host of oriental fantasies. Ponty's, who were already running a wine bar, have extended their local operations to include the restaurant in the north hall.

Available units have little problem in finding new tenants who still have to undergo committee vetting – and that includes comment from both Forum and community association. Some tenants who took the plunge in 1980 as small but established businesses have spread their services and reputation well

beyond The Market. The Body Shop, little known in 1980, is now a public company. Thornton's, a private company in the chocolate business, was then new to London. While a number of others have expanded to a lesser extent, the essential ambience of originality and the unexpected remains largely undiluted.

One name which really is already splashed about the shopping world has slipped inside this speciality net – despite recourse to the courts. The GLC fought this particular transfer because it believed that the presence of a chain store and merchandise with a high street image would affect The Market's reputation as a prestigious speciality shopping centre. The judge deemed otherwise, saying that a multiple – a named firm with many outlets – could provide specialist goods, that the proposed stock was individual in that not all outlets sold the same goods and that there were already Market shops which could be found in other high streets.

It was an ominous decision. The main attraction of high street shopping is its convenience of which mass production and lower prices are but a part. The point of the speciality centre such as The Market lies in its difference, its individuality of which the goods, even the names, are as essential as the ambience and atmosphere, including in this case the historic building. Tenants are exceedingly concerned about the possibility that other multiple stores with equally well known names may also try to increase this first foothold and cash in on The Market's commercial success. They fear that rising rents could force out the eccentric and unusual in favour of the ordinary, the average or quite simply tat.

• GLC PLANTING AROUND THE PIAZZA •



The Market has once again become such an obvious centre of attraction in Covent Garden, a great credit to the GLC as owners, creators and operators, that it can overshadow other equally important changes and achievements. As a major landowner, GLC politicians and the professional team were aware of the importance of setting the pace for regeneration, its quality and success. For this The Market building and even the surrounding piazza was only one, if an important, key. The initial efforts to attract restaurants and shops around the edge of the Flower Market helped sow some seeds of confidence and began to accustom people to the idea that Covent Garden was worth a detour. Meanwhile decisions had to be taken about the future of the large areas of space inside the Flower and Jubilee Markets, the latter with its supposedly temporary but highly successful market stalls and sports hall.

First the Flower Market. Considered also for an exhibition centre and a palm house, it was finally allocated as a museum complex, in the knowledge that museums are people draws in their own right and that they could provide a useful exchange of clientele. The GLC team was extremely conscious that Covent Garden's regeneration, largely based as it was on shopping, depended on the attraction of people with money to spend and the immediate

catchment area, even including office workers, could in no way support the proposed level of shops and restaurants. Covent Garden had to have a wider appeal – to families living in the suburbs and tourists in London whether from home and overseas. Museums could help swell the numbers.

But that in a sense is justification after the event. And it really was a special event. A temporary exhibition was held inside the Flower Market to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the 1926 general strike and London Transport provided one of its older buses as part of the show. Parked in the street by day, it was moved indoors for safety overnight and looked so well that the idea of moving the collection to this new home in central London occurred simultaneously to both London Transport and the GLC. It opened some three months before The Market. As the collection was assembled from Syon Park, trains, buses, locomotives and underground carriages were measured up to ensure that they could make the final leg of their journey into the building. They did all just make it – in one case with only about one and a half inches to spare. Normally they arrived at night and were then levered into place in the traffic-free quiet of the early morning. Geoffrey Holland however remembers the night a tube train stuck across Wellington Street with London Transport's crash crew struggling to

insert it through the door before it sank into the pavement. So far the museum has averaged about 200,000 paying visitors a year. 'It isn't as many as we would like, of course, but we have been badly affected by certain economic factors,' says John Freebourne, the keeper, who then lists transport strikes, the miners's strike (it affected British tourism) and the teachers's dispute which has reduced the number of school parties.



The Flower Market 1974



Transformation to Museum



Transformation to Museum

With the sort of history which can beset any project dependent on government finance, the second museum – for the performing arts – has yet to arrive. Its opening is now scheduled for Shakespeare's birthday in 1987, some 13 years after the appointment of director Alexander Schouvaloff. Then it was expected to go to Somerset House but the fine rooms were restored so splendidly – they were too fine, in fact – that other objets d'art, let alone theatrical ephemera, could not hope to compete for reasonable display. A switch to the Flower Market, which provides more space was approved in 1975 for completion in 1978. It has been postponed, cancelled, rescued following public petition and establishment support, postponed again. Finally an anonymous donor came up with £250,000 and work started on site in January 1984 – by which time the project was likely to cost little short of £5,000,000 compared with original £680,000.

Generally the new museum will cover theatre, opera, ballet, music hall, circus, rock and roll, pop music and variety with a small theatre and three spaces for exhibitions, one historical and semi-permanent with changing displays, and two temporary areas devoted to specific subjects such as a playwright, an actor or a musician. Mr. Schouvaloff is very complimentary about the atmosphere which has been created in the new garden, the

general sense of joy, happiness and wellbeing. 'People smile when they walk around,' he says. 'I want them to smile when they walk into the museum and say: "This is going to be fun", not "Christ, another museum".

The redevelopment including restoration of the Jubilee Hall on the south side of The Market should also be complete in early 1987. It too has had a chequered history. As finally conceived however the scheme could be a trendsetter in that it has in large part been financed by existing small businesses, which will remain intact. The 1978 action area plan envisaged complete redevelopment and a project was chosen in June 1980 for a mixture of offices, shops and homes. Almost immediately after a strong local campaign culminated in the addition of one more building – the Jubilee Hall – to the list of architectural and historic merit. The other scheme was abandoned.

There was continuing strong support for the retention of the local sports facilities and even more support including a petition with about 120,000 signatures for keeping the market. A new draft brief was drawn up and eventually a scheme produced by the Jubilee Hall Development Consortium was given the go-ahead. The consortium includes the Jubilee Hall Recreation Centre, a company limited by guarantee, the community association, the market traders association, Sherman and Waterman Associates, the firm which has been running the market, and the Soho Housing Association. The community association has no financial stake but two active members were involved in the feasibility study and have been appointed architects.

'We devised a scheme whereby the rebuilding of the market and the refurbishment and extension of the sports hall would be financed by selling to the traders on a timeshare basis,' says the market traders's chairman Ray Green, a former tailor's cutter who with his partner set up a fabric stall on site in 1975. Apart from sport and the market, the scheme provides 28 housing association homes, 12,000 sq. ft. offices, a cafe, workshops, storage and public conveniences. The development partners are Speyhawk Land and Estate, the property company which holds the 125-year head lease

for a £1,000,000 premium and has a number of sub-leases for the various components.

The interesting innovation concerns the market traders. At the mass meeting in the Empire Rooms in Tottenham Court Road, Ray Green proposed that individual stallholders should raise the cash to buy their space for 125 years and get the development off the ground. Leaving on one side the 200 or so antique traders, who make a less regular appearance, there were about 1,000 spaces available in each week divided between the general traders, who take over from Tuesday to Friday and the craft market which moves in on Saturdays and Sundays. Lloyds Bank were prepared to lend money to those needing loans and eventually some 250 contracts were signed ranging upwards from £3,600 for one stall on one day a week. Some traders bought as many as three pitches on four days and therefore had to find about £40,000. Sherman and Waterman

Associates purchased the whole of Monday to continue the present set-up for antiques. In so doing they became the owners of 165 of the 700 company shares. However no one shareholder, whatever the holding, can have more than 16 votes, a limit designed to avoid any possibility of takeover or control by one interest. The sale of daily occupation rights raised about £2,300,000 which together with interest and the profit from rents during the two-year construction programme, is producing £3,000,000 interest-free money up front towards the building costs. The GLC designated a special working party under Labour member Charles Rossi to smoothe out any wrinkles and with support from Conservative Sandy Sandford won the necessary backing of Westminster, which as planning authority equally had to be convinced. In the event, the market, which most pension funds and property developers regarded as a liability, has provided the key to a highly individualistic inner-city venture.



· MORE GOOD THINGS IN THE GARDEN ·



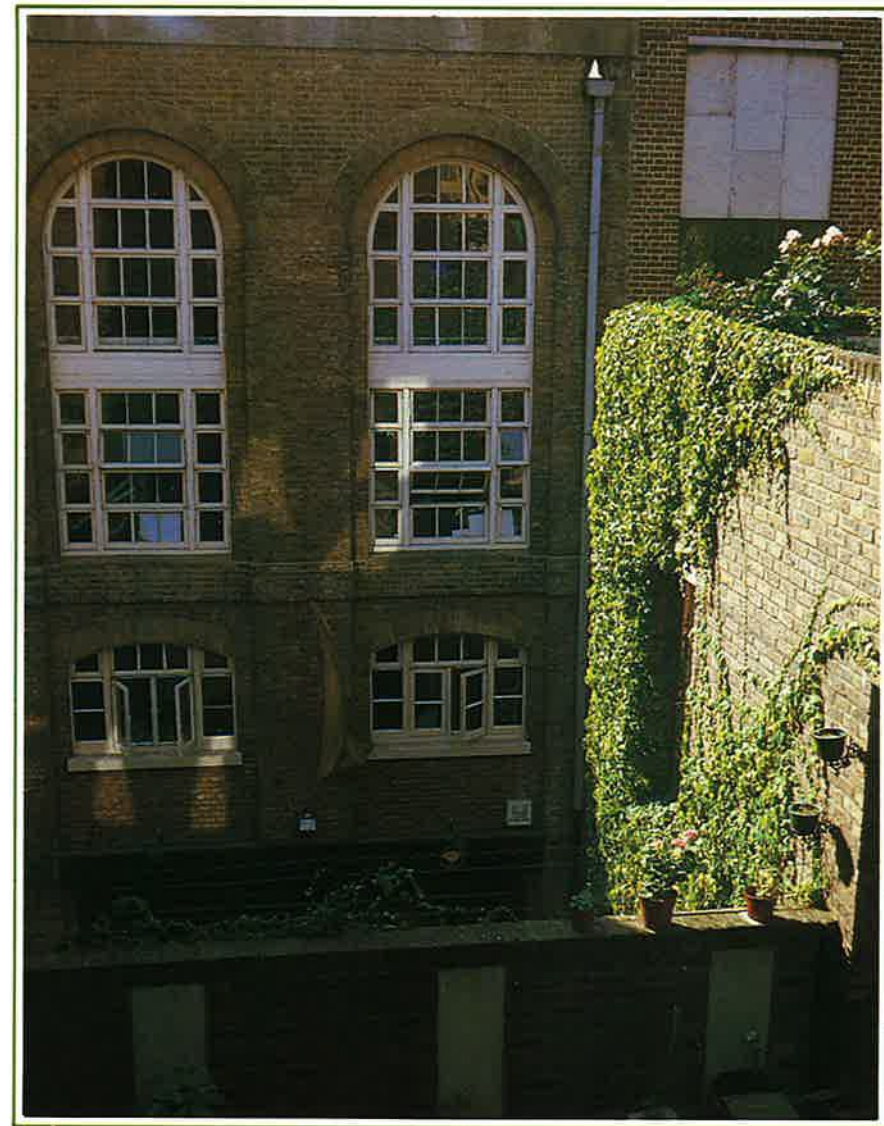
Many people think Covent Garden is simply the piazza, The Market and other buildings, with perhaps the Royal Opera House as an up-market renegade attraction which has somehow escaped round the corner into Bow Street. In reality however the area stretches very broadly from the Strand through to Holborn and Shaftesbury Avenue in the north, Kingsway in the east and Charing Cross Road in the west. And it is this swathe of central London land as a whole which has equally been affected by the tremendous programme of regeneration of the past 12 years. A number of GLC-owned properties scattered right through the area have been improved and converted into homes and shops, workspace and premises for organisations which add considerably to this city centre's life. In other cases often quite small new developments have been inserted like a missing piece of jigsaw. Private roof gardens have been created known only to inhabitants and visitors who happen to look out across the jumble of yards, fire escapes and urban accretia.

Sometimes a housing association has taken over upstairs flats or maisonettes, the GLC retaining management of the rest of the building. Sometimes the GLC has let shops to concerns which fit in with the area's fashionable image and can pay the highest of rents. At others, in line with promises in the action area plan and responding to pressure

from the Forum and community association, shops have been let for a particular local use – for example for the sale of wet fish, haberdashery and even pets. At one point it looked as if bookshops might be driven from their traditional base in Charing Cross Road by rising rents. Instead the quartier has been retained with leases which now specify the sale of books.

Such an approach, while admittedly not cashing in on possible short-term gain from the fashions of the moment, has strengthened the quality and variety of life in the town which is Covent Garden. And this in turn contributes to its attraction as a place to visit, which should mean more customers for everyone. Such wider community considerations follow very much in the tradition of the Bedford estate, which also aimed to balance long-term interests with profitable investment. While the very best of property companies still do the same, too often absentee corporate landlords with finance from equally absent institutions show more interest in simplicity, security and the immediate bottom line return.

A similar approach has been taken occasionally to allow charitable organisations access to the area. The two museums provide one example. 'We tried to balance the gain for the area in life, activity and attraction against any reduction in revenue as compared with what could have



been obtained if the building were let for another more lucrative use,' said Jean Merriton, when she reported to the GLC about the theatre museum negotiations in 1975. The London Ecology Centre is another, providing space for a number of nature conservation organisations together with exhibition and lecture facilities and a small cafe which is sub-leased to a local cooperative. The Central London Youth Project which provides computer training, classes in photography, dance and music and recreation facilities, is another. In Floral Street a property is being converted into the National Jazz Centre. In Wellington Street, the original idea for a puppet centre financed by two floors of offices has fallen through and the building is likely to be converted to provide theatre workshop or a building museum.

In many other parts of the garden the GLC has ensured the continuation of the area's special role as a nursery for small business through the construction and conversion of such workspace. Nottingham Court in Shorts Gardens for

example includes two workshops as well as six flats and six shops. Workshops feature in the Stukeley Street section of development at the top of Drury Lane. In Macklin Street a partnership scheme with the Industrial and Commercial Finance Corporation helped advance more workspace when public finance was, as has become increasingly usual, under tight control. The GLC retained management responsibilities and a share in the income. Earlham Street warehouse with space for many more jobs became another joint venture, this time with Christina Smith. Hers was the only expression of interest when essential expensive works became immediately necessary in the late 1970s. The subsequent lease included a period rent free followed by a 50/50 split of net income and the GLC leased back premises occupied by the community centre and CLYP. Since then the GLC has sold the freehold and the warehouse, now, renamed Seven Dials, includes an art gallery and brasserie-style restaurant as well as the original light industry and the two special tenants listed above.



· PRIVATE PLANTING IN THE GARDEN ·



Ching Court 1984

If the GLC as owner of some 10 per cent of local property has provided a solid foundation for social and economic regeneration, it was of course absolutely necessary that other organisations and more particularly people should equally play their parts upon the Covent Garden stage. Many have, of which or whom it is only possible to mention a few.

No. 5 Dryden Street, which opened in 1972, now provides shared work space for about 70 small firms, about 200 people, connected with design and the arts. Businesses can grow from one person with a desk and filing cabinet, when contact with other people can be all important, to occupy a whole floor – at which point they will probably want to move out into more conventional separate premises. While the building is owned by the Mecers's Company, a major Covent Garden land owner, the lease is held on a market rent by AST Design Services, the collaborative company owned by the people who currently rent space. Like the Jubilee Market traders, the arrangement allows individuals and small firms to have a stake in their building or workspace. At Dryden Street, tenants are licensees and receive shares in proportion to their individual space, which gives them voting power over company policy. Day-to-day management is left to professional management which has to find new people as tenants come and go.

Next comes Neal's Yard, one of Covent Garden's traditional cobbled courts, and verbal shorthand for another new working community. Nicholas Saunders, author of *Alternative London* and *Alternative England and Wales*, bought one warehouse there in the late 1960s. He had been living in a community in Denmark but travelling regularly to London to collect wholefood supplies. However when the lease to a company making stage scenery ended, he decided to set up a shop inside the yard selling the same type of goods to small food cooperatives.

'My idea was to do a pricing system that gave a different price per pound for large or small sizes,' says Nicholas Saunders now. In other words, the more people bought at one time, the lower the price. Instead of the routine percentage mark up, he worked out the cost of each process – such as weighing and packaging – so that each item, whatever its size, would make money but still undercut the market at large. News of the lower prices spread fast and Neal's Yard, despite its lack of street frontage and parking, flourished. Less obvious to the purchasing public, Mr Saunders also experimented with management techniques setting up two teams of five people, each of whom worked only three days a week, when they had to do everything for a straightforward percentage of the takings on those particular days. One person would manage for two

weeks at a time and then revert to simple team membership.

After about a year he took on another building in the yard, once again did all the building work with friends and then helped set up the bakery, which has since become a workers' cooperative.

Other initiatives followed including a flour mill, a dairy and a coffee shop in Monmouth Street, an idea which occurred in part because stocking coffee beans in the wholefood shop had been a runaway success, but one which did not appeal on principle to all the staff. As the shops became established, Nicholas Saunders withdrew his interest, even eventually from the original venture. Then its removal under new management to premises in Shorts Gardens brought renewed impetus and he has converted the original Neal's Yard shop into an apothecary and a salad bar with therapy rooms for alternative medicine overhead. He however is now concentrating on a new role as inventor.

Next door to Neal's Yard, Marler Estates has completed the Seven Dials, an interesting scheme, designed by Levitt Bernstein Associates, which was originally to include 20 housing association homes but which have been built and sold privately because of shortage of public funds. The development fronts two roads – Shorts Gardens, where it has

involved the conversion of a warehouse, and Monmouth Street, where a modern version of eighteenth century architecture has been built alongside a precise reconstruction. The Monmouth Street shops have entrances inside a new inner court, which also contains a restaurant and links on through to Neal's Yard. The homes have a private upper-level deck and workshop space has been inserted below ground. There is about 7,500 sq ft office space in five properties facing onto Shorts Gardens.

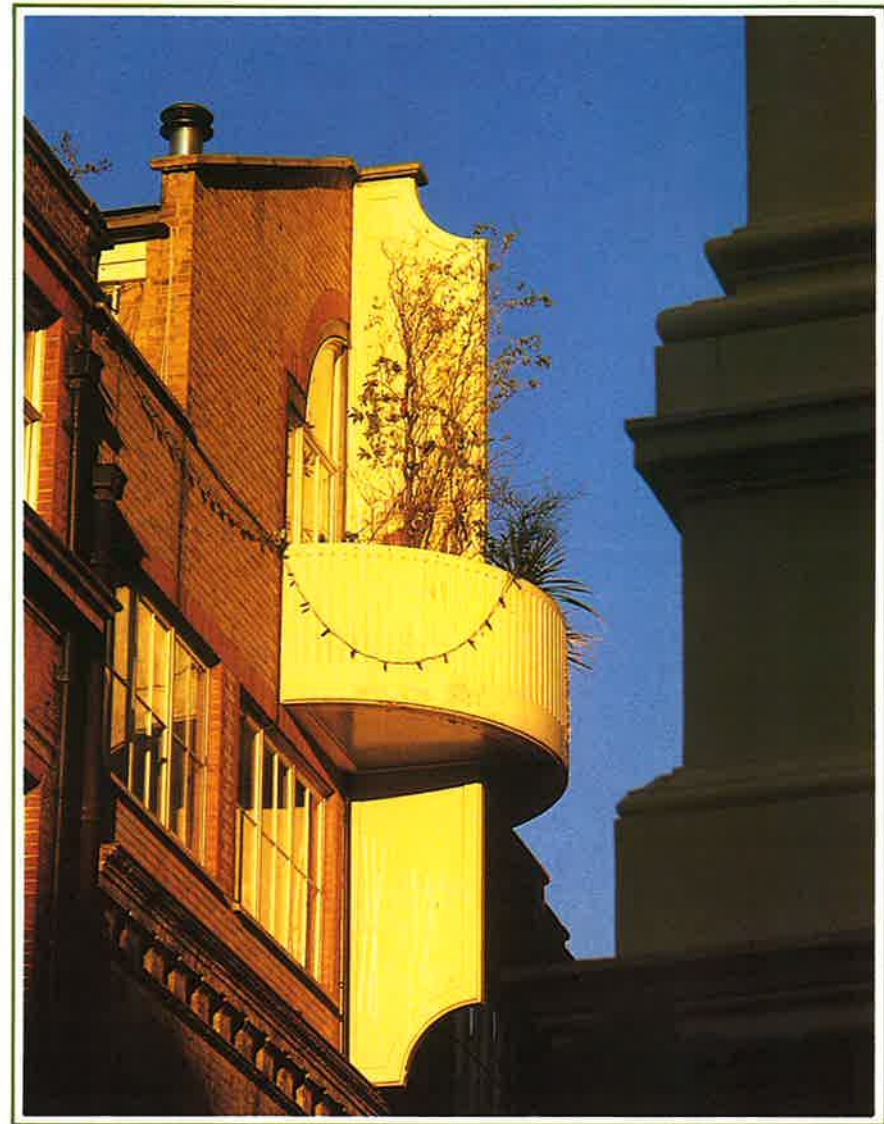
Seven Dials was named after a 40 ft Doric pillar crowned with six sundials, just short of the seven necessary to face each of the streets which converge to form a *ronde point* or star. The area was laid out in the 1690s, not many years after the piazza, by Thomas Neale, a successful property speculator. However the pillar was pulled down in 1773 by a London mob which was convinced there was treasure buried beneath (there was not) and its remains finally found their way to Surrey. An appeal is well under way under the chairmanship of David Bieda, who runs the Central London Youth Project and is a Forum member, to mount a replica to commemorate the achievements of the past 15 years.

Comyn Ching, architectural ironmongers based in Seven Dials for more than 250 years, are

making the actual sundials. They are also in the middle of another important conservation and renewal scheme, this time of 30 seventeenth and eighteenth century properties which, together with two new corner buildings, will once again complete the triangle. With the usual Covent Garden mixture of shops, offices and flats, the development has seen the removal of outbuildings from the centre and the subsequent creation by the Terry Farrell



Floral Place – the carriage works 1984





The Sanctuary 1985



St Martins School of Art



Partnership of a new Covent Garden courtyard and public space which is highly significant in architectural as well as community terms. There has been no question here of adopting a self-effacing lookalike approach. Instead substantial, almost classical, doors rising from curved steps provide separate office entrances. The confidence with which the new had been grafted onto traditional domestic architecture, painstakingly restored, must originally have

startled the historic buildings advisers. But the effect is masterful, elegant and fun. Conservation of these particular properties has proved very expensive and has only proved possible because of Covent Garden's commercial success.

Around the corner Christina Smith has been equally if not more influential in developing new business and restoring the fabric of the city. Starting with Goods and Chattels, she is now often described as the squire of Neal Street, where she has concentrated most of her activities including the creation of a number of speciality shops and the refurbishment of the Earham Street warehouse, now named Seven Dials. A former brewery, it now includes a multitude of concerns including Smith's restaurant, an art gallery and the GLC community tenants already mentioned.

Dance has been another successful private adventure in Covent Garden. Floral Street saw the development of the original Dance Centre (now The Fitness Centre) and The Sanctuary, which was created inside a warehouse in 1977 to provide a luxurious swimming pool and tropical water garden in which London-weary women can swim, relax and treat the birds and animals with respect. 'They are not dangerous,' says the current brochure. 'But when provoked or irritated you must expect them to retaliate.'

Nearby Langley Street is the home of Pineapple Dance and there are now a number of health clubs in the area.

In Long Acre the Inner London Education Authority has converted one building into the St Martin's School of Art, Heron has completed a mixed development and Capital and Counties have more recently transformed the one remaining coachmaker's yard, now yet another attractive court to penetrate on a Covent Garden ramble.

Designed by Frederick Gibberd Coombes and Partners, the project involves a mixture of shops and offices at the front, with flats, workshops and studios to the rear.

And still the list of major restoration and development goes on. In Floral Street, Property Holding and Investment Trust has inserted more offices, shops and flats. In Monmouth Street, the rundown Shaftesbury Hotel has been restored to become the new Mountbatten Hotel. In Chandos Place, Brookmount Properties have replaced the former medical school with flats and offices, now let to a publishing firm. The National Provident Institution has converted numerous properties in the block between Maiden Lane and Henrietta Street. The terracotta facade of the former Civil Service Store presents a newly scrubbed face, behind

which the interior has been rebuilt to provide a large new store or stores and office space.

The Royal Opera House has achieved an extension which so well blends into James Street that it might well be part of the original building. Beside Bow street police station, a former girls' hostel has been converted into a small homely hotel in the front parlour of which broods Smokey, the parrot. In Endell Street, a stained glass factory has emerged as the home of advertising agents, its patterned brickwork springcleaned to please the wandering eye. New activity abounds and scaffolding simply moves from one street to the next as refurbishment and renewal continue.

One of the largest developments – by MEPC at the top of Bow Street – does not exactly fit the general low-key idiom. A blockbuster which lacks the saving grace of ground floor shops, it breaks two of Covent Garden's golden rules, even if conforming in height and architecturally modelled with some skill. But behind this particular scheme there lies a tale and the result is probably as good as circumstances would permit.

Briefly IPC, the magazine publishers, once occupied the site together with one across the road, now known as Odhams Walk. The



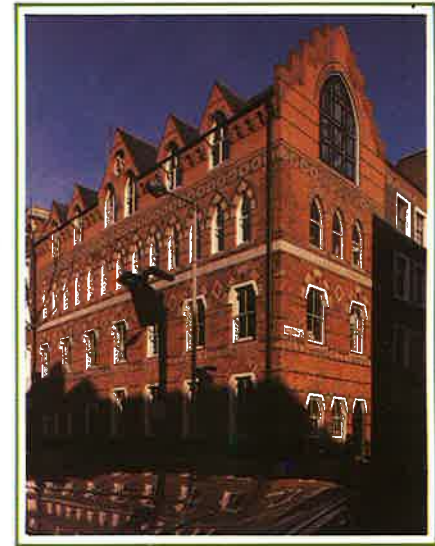
MEPC – Long Acre

developers already had a planning permission dating back to 1965 for the construction of a 12-storey newspaper building with nearly 700,000 sq ft space, the equivalent of more than three Centre Points, and a potential physical intrusion of the sort from which it was believed that Covent Garden had been saved. However the developers were not going to yield their rights lightly and in October 1973 the parties settled for about 250,000 sq ft offices with the site over the road leased for 125 years to the GLC at a peppercorn for the construction of promised new homes and a number of shops. 'At one time during our protracted negotiations,' said Lord Ponsonby when the agreement in principle was announced, 'it looked as though we might be faced with either another office tower or with having to pay heavy compensation (up to £20 million) to prevent it. This is not a case where the GLC has achieved public benefit in return for a planning consent. The developers

already had a legal entitlement to build a block which would have affronted current public feeling.' However feeling was still affronted, partly because the new building contained speculative offices at a time when the days of quick easy profits for ugly development were within all too recent memory, partly because the new block eliminated one of the area's most attractive temporary communal gardens and partly because the details were rushed through under pressure from the developers without time for proper Forum comment, a matter which frosted the beginnings of trust between community and council. If the hotel at the top of Drury Lane, which includes a section of 1968 plan road, and Coutts bank on the south-west corner with its 1968 plan subway mark the end of the old style of development in Covent Garden, the MEPC building marks both the end of the old and the beginning of the new.



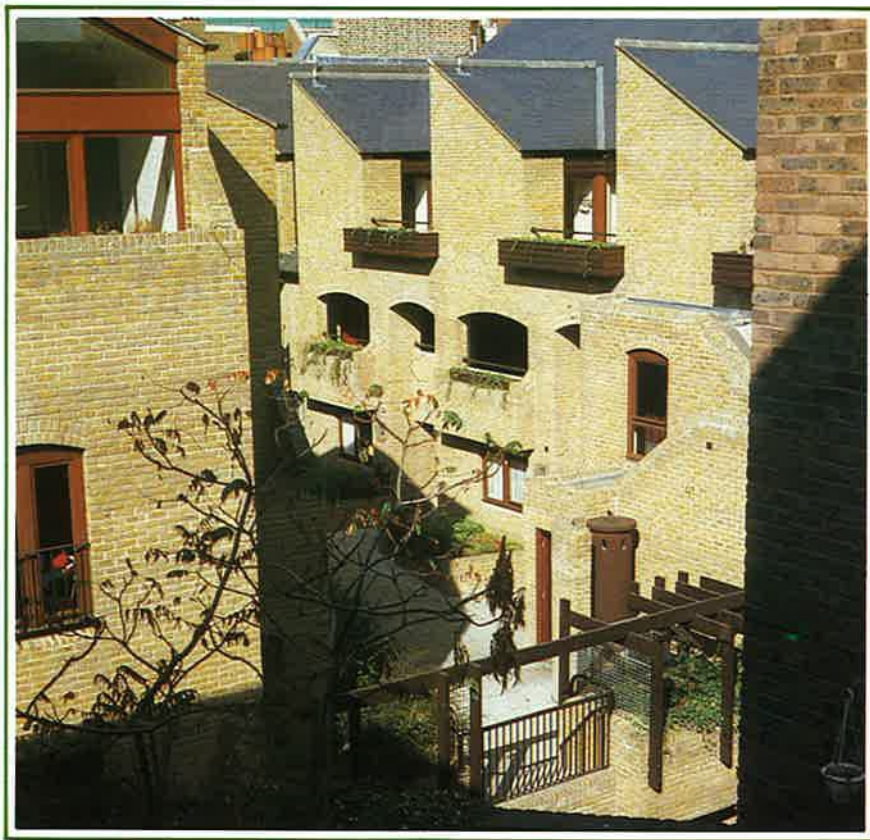
Neals Yard



22 Endell Street

HOUSING...THE KEY TO THE COMMUNITY'S FUTURE.





Endell Street – Shelton Street

As part of the MEPC deal, the GLC gained a large site virtually rent free for 125 years on which it built the council's biggest development in the area. A prize-winning scheme with 102 homes, Odhams Walk demonstrated in kind that plans were not just empty promises, that the regeneration of Covent Garden really would include special provision for local people in terms of housing, community facilities and shops. Critics there will always be and some Covent Garden minds complain because Odhams Walk does not conform to straightforward historic building practice in the area – in other words, individual buildings in terrace format with housing over shops, light industry in the basement and possibly a cobbled yard within.

But Odhams Walk as built provides privacy for a large number of people in the midst of

hurly-burly. The scale on the perimeter matches that of the surrounding area and quite naturally the bulk of shops are located there along the street. Within the development – and in daylight the casual visitor can stroll through – the homes for more than 300 people step down and interlock in such a way that most enjoy their own private garden. With plants spreading tendrils across the brickwork and a mass of shrubs and seasonal flowers, Odhams Walk has grown into a garden within the garden. Apart from space for an information technology centre run by CLYP, facilities include a day centre run by Age Concern, a health centre and a dentist. Shops include auction rooms displaced from Long Acre, a chemist, furniture, haberdashery and hardware, an optician, a newsagent, baby wear, a butcher, a baker and an off licence. Car parking was deliberately restricted to some 16 spaces and the extensive basements are being converted into a squash club.



50 Neal Street

In all the GLC has provided more than 200 new homes in Covent Garden including, apart from Odhams Walk, smaller schemes in Tower Street, Matthews Yard, Drury Lane, Nottingham Court, Shelton Street, Shaftesbury Avenue and 20 through conversion of former market properties. Camden has carried out a number of developments including some 90 homes for about 300 people in Dudley House at the northern end of Endell Street. The Peabody Trust has replaced part of the Bedfordbury tenements new homes. The Jubilee Hall site includes more housing association homes and Community Housing Association has been responsible for a number of conversions, particularly in the Seven Dials Housing action area, which Camden declared in 1977. About 95 per cent of the 240 properties have now been improved, together with a general upgrading of the local environment mainly by paving, tree planting

and restrictions on traffic. A special local housing action area consultative committee was set up and residents once again very actively helped decide what should be done and where.

Private developers have also produced schemes for nearly 100 more homes to bring the combined total well above 500 and more than double the population. There has also been a rolling programme to upgrade other property – the GLC at Sandringham Flats East, Peabody in Wild Street, Westminster in Martlet Court and a housing association at Thurston and Holland Dwellings, a scheme which combines spring colours and the introduction of one of Covent Garden's new public clocks, in this case capping the core for the new lift and a contribution from the architects. The other new clock, which adorns the western end of St Paul's church, was presented by the Heritage of London Trust.

There are now more than 5,000 people living in Covent Garden. For some time, some local residents carped at slow progress. Little did they know that almost every single scheme had to be fought through a government bureaucracy which did not like the development style, density or price. In the case of Odhams Walk, Alan Greengross as Conservative chairman personally won over the support of the then Labour housing minister Reg Freeson to overcome bureaucratic obstacles then blocking its progress. Once again a political party pushed for the plan as a whole. For the Tories it was a question of holding on to the public housing element, for Labour of permitting more offices than might have been expected. Both sides were prepared to do this because they knew the plan for action had been hammered out with the community as a whole.



Odhams Walk

· SOME LESSONS... SOME CONCERN ·



History repeats itself they say and how true that is of Covent Garden. An Edward Gouge lived in King Street in the early days. The most recent Labour chairman has been another Edward Gouge, a lecturer in planning. The market is a market still, retail instead of wholesale, but equally attracting people for the atmosphere as much for the produce. Surrounding streets still hum with shops and business, taverns and coffee shops. Coteries and clubs are ever present. The Sanctuary is perhaps the best known modern alternative to the hummum, only this time round it is men who are not admitted. The nobs arrive for evenings at the opera in highly polished carriages with a different kind of horsepower. Creative people jostle ideas one against the other. The famous and infamous still mix with Londoners who would not wish for either description. A strong local community flourishes, above and behind the daily bustle of the streets. The worst of living conditions have yet again been swept away. Property leases still include tight clauses to prevent the infiltration of activities and items for sale which could downgrade the atmosphere and tone, only this time round the pressure for high standards has come from local people and their representatives on the Forum and the GLC instead of the former private owner, the Bedford Estate. In other words, for all the upheaval and change of recent years, the essence of Covent Garden remains the same and the area has retained the qualities which made and still make it one of the liveliest in London.

While Covent Garden is special, as is any place or community, some conclusions can perhaps be drawn. In any settlement organic renewal is much more acceptable and causes fewer problems than wholesale rebuilding. Change is always upsetting but slow evolution rather than revolution in the city allows people – and they

are what cities are all about – to adjust more easily as existing citizens, at home or work, or as newcomers hopefully trying to put down new roots. It really has helped in Covent Garden to retain and build on the historic grain, the network of streets and alleyways which men and women have used for centuries, rather than build over the shortcuts and widen roads and then wonder what has happened to the people and the place. Covent Garden's shape is still familiar.

The same is true of buildings which provide a very influential frame in terms of both activity and lifestyle. As in many older British towns, many streets are terraces composed of individual properties more or less the same. Divisions in the main are vertical, space restricted and each has its own front door, sometimes two. The very form of building promotes variety and vitality. Space upstairs sometimes provides homes, sometimes offices or studios. The ground floor can become a shop, the basement possibly a workshop. Each is more or less self-contained and limited in size. The business occupants quite naturally turn outwards to the community. When they need stationery, printing, hardware, timber, lunch, a drink, they go out, which is not nearly so true of people in the single blockbuster development, who can form almost an independent indoor village. Arriving and leaving often through one single entrance, its inhabitants rarely need to use the community outside.

Covent Garden's conservation policies have therefore been all important – the original almost random listing of so many buildings, the retention of a mix of activity, not just within the area but within individual properties. As a result, not only has the scale remained comfortable but the streets are alive at most

hours of the day and night. And that very vitality attracts outsiders whose custom is essential to prosperity – and continued vitality.

The variety and size of space in such a close-knit quartier has also allowed scope for individual and community initiative and enterprise – a network of community gardens, the emergence of Alternative Arts which has staged festivals and entertainment with such flair that the area is now renowned worldwide for theatre in the street, Dryden Street as one of the original shared workspace ventures, alternative shops including a cooperative in Neal's Yard and most recently the banding together of about 250 market traders to stay in business by buying pitches on a timeshare basis and in so doing fund the unprofitable parts of a major development.

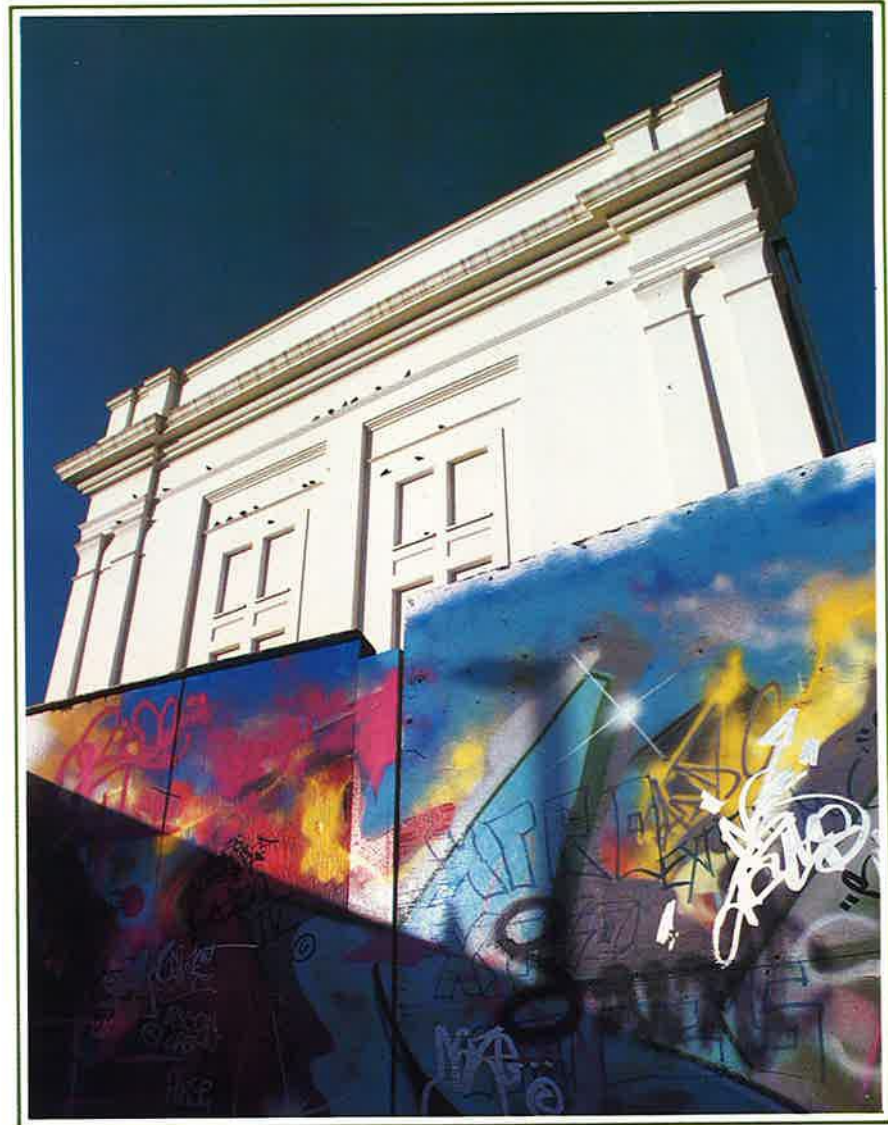
A third important theme has been participation of the people. The Forum with its specific membership of different interests and expertise has led to much greater understanding of the interlocking nature of the city and members have devoted long evenings to the detailed handling of the area. Since its inception, the Forum has had the right to attend and speak at GLC Covent Garden committee meetings. The community association has made an equally powerful contribution and, although less democratically responsible by its very nature, members have spun ideas and action as well as protest. More recently it also has had the right of committee membership. Tension there has been – between individuals, groups and the GLC – but it has been creative.

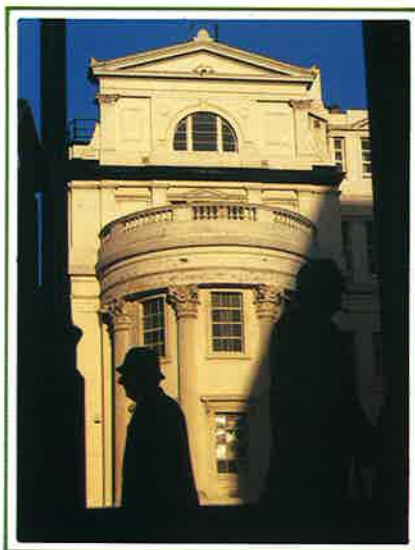
Next comes urban management. Ambience or character can be created in the streets as in the theatre. If the stage is good, as is the case in Covent Garden, then imaginative, sensitive and



firm direction can produce a place which people visit and revisit because they find it fun. On a necessary commercial note, there is no compulsion but they do tend to spend money as well. The creation of this atmosphere requires an expertise which goes far beyond that of traditional shopping centre management with the selection of tenants, collection of rents, security, cleanliness and general maintenance. In Covent Garden it has involved the detailed examination of shopkeeper's goods as well as financial references and an equally systematic approach with respect to crafts and buskers or entertainment.

With busking for example it really does matter enormously who plays or does what, where, when and how. The truly ungifted, rude or crude can quickly sour the atmosphere, as can even the better performer at the wrong time or place. And the busker who floods noise over too wide a





radius through amplification can provoke local residents, shopkeepers and office workers to the point of war, even if those at leisure are perfectly happy. The balance is very delicate.

Nor do craft markets run themselves. They need the excitement of change through the regular availability of stalls to newcomers. They also need some form of quality control if the centre is to hold onto its reputation. This is even more true with respect to the selection of shops as the normal turnover of tenants begins. Once an area like Covent Garden meets with success and attract the crowds, all kinds of people and companies selling anything or everything are only too willing to replace the original pioneers. Their ability to pay large premiums on transfer of leases can quickly lead to total transformation of character, if not an actual decline. Standards have rigorously to be maintained.

Over the wider area the GLC has been able through ownership to set an example and to ensure the continued provision of community interest and needs. A contribution to local quality of life as well as a good financial return has figured in the Covent Garden balance sheet. And that has been true of several local business interests, whose also care.

Quite naturally the GLC's abolition has created a great deal of insecurity and worry. The future control and management of its widespread properties matter greatly both to the community and Londoners at large. So does the willingness of successor politicians and professionals in the two very different boroughs to continue to regard the action plan as Holy Writ. But even with good intent, knowledge and understanding, they have a difficult task. A number of major developments currently loom, most if not all large in themselves and pleading for large injections of office space. Moss Brothers store wants to modernise and requires offices to fund its transformation. North of Long Acre, the Mercers Company has two blocks of land for which they have been drawing up proposals and the future shape and intensity of which will have tremendous impact. The Royal Opera House wishes to improve, modernise and extend its facilities, the funding for which it hopes will come from profitable commercial

development of shops and offices. It wants to re-establish an entrance in the piazza and recreate an Inigo Jones style colonnade. While a working party has been set up to include both Forum and community association, unless someone comes up with clever funding as in the case of the Jubilee Market, the prospect of over-development is very real. Then the police have a scheme for rehabilitating the former Charing Cross hospital. The Peabody Trust wishes to fund the second phase of Bedfordbury through the construction of offices. Off Drury Lane Westminster has been marketing Bruce House, a hostel for single homeless men, for £1 on the proviso that the new owner funds a new smaller hostel as well as building offices. There are also a number of smaller hospitals which have become redundant and the future of which is under consideration.

While change is both natural and essential, these are all large developments which taken together could upset the balance and dramatically alter Covent Garden's character. But perhaps the best hope lies, as it has done in the past, with the community. In Covent Garden, people care enough to talk, argue, lobby and fight against what seems wrong and for what seems right. There is a force to reckon with should the new guardians and promoters of change take insufficient care.

**Chairs of GLC Covent Garden Committees
1968-86**

**Consortium of GLC, City of Westminster,
London Borough of Camden.**

1968-70 Chairman of Working Party
Alan Greengross

Covent Garden Development Committee

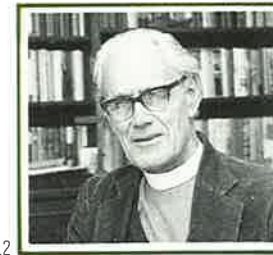
1970-71 Richard M. Brew
1971-72 Countess of Dartmouth
1972-73 Robert Mitchell
Lena Townsend
(acting from January 1973)
1973-77 Tom Ponsonby
succeeded by Jean Merriton

Covent Garden Committee

1977-78 Alan Greengross
1978-81 Dr Mark Patterson

Covent Garden Panel

1981-86 Ed Gouge



Acknowledgements

A large number of the people involved in the regeneration of Covent Garden have been extremely helpful in providing interviews, information and encouragement in the research for this book. They included politicians, officers and members of the Covent Garden Forum and the Covent Garden Community Association, together with people who live and/or work in the area.

I would particularly like to thank: Brian Anson, Martin Braham, Donald Ball, Christina Smith (1), Ruth Cadbury, Edwina Carroll, Fred Collins (2), Grace Cook (3), Robin Dartington, Alan Flint, Daryl Fowler, John Freebourne, Douglas Gordon, Edward Gouge, Ray Green, Alan Greengross, Bob Harris (4), Jenny Hobson, Geoffrey Holland (5), Brian Jolly, Doreen King, Mick Malone, Robert Mitchell, Jim Monahan, Jim O'Connor, Michael Pargiter, Simon Pembroke, Maggie Pinhorn (6), Lord Ponsonby, Ron Reynolds, the Rt Hon Geoffrey Rippon MP, Fiona Ross, Sandy Sandford, Nicholas Saunders (7), Alexander Schouvaloff, John Toomey (8), David Bieda (9), Brian Stout, Brian Sweby, Dick Thickett, Robert Thorne, Noel Tobin, Rennie Turner (10), Tim Wachter (11), Adrian Watts, Sue West, the Rev Austen Williams (12), John Wood and Geoffrey Wright.

*Judy Hillman
January, 1986*

First Published in Great Britain by The Greater
London Council, County Hall, London SE1 7PB.

© 1986 Judy Hillman

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may
be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or
transmitted, in any form or by any means,
electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or
otherwise, without the prior permission of the
copyright holder.

SBN 7168 1577 X

Designed and produced by GLC Public Relations
Branch and printed by Howard Hunt Litho

3795/10M/3.86

Photographs by Ed Pritchard, Tony Isbitt, Alan Flint,
Geoffrey Holland and other members of the Covent
Garden team.



GLC
Working for London