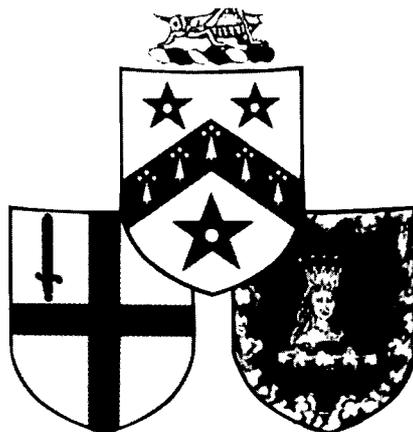


*G R E S H A M*  
*COLLEGE*



**FUNCTION, FASHION AND FINANCE:  
A NEW SENSE OF ARCHITECTURAL  
PURPOSE FOR THE CITY?**

An inaugural Gresham Lecture by

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Gresham Professor of Rhetoric

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INAUGURAL LECTURE BY SIR ANDREW DERBYSHIRE AS

GRESHAM PROFESSOR OF RHETORIC, 27 NOVEMBER 1990

My first reaction to the invitation to the Gresham College Chair of Rhetoric was astonishment. What qualifications had I to lecture on rhetoric? The answer was that I could choose my own subject to be rhetorical about, but what about architecture and planning? - a matter of great topical interest in the City. I then had to confess ignorance about the College, and did a little research into the history of the Institution. My mind was made up when I learnt that the College from its foundation at the end of the 17th century had been the meeting place of people like Pepys, Hooke, Boyle, Wren, and occasionally King Charles II, and the generator of the 'Invisible College' which was to become the Royal Society. Here was the marriage of art and science which gave birth to the early splendours of the Industrial Revolution.

The goings on at Gresham College reported by Pepys makes rivetting reading. The King laughed at them for trying to find the weight of air and not doing much else. After the Great Fire, there was much discussion about the rebuilding of the City. There's a hair-raising description of what Pepys called 'a pretty experiment' in blood transfusion in which 'The blood of one dog let out (till he died) into the body of another on one side, while all his own run out on the other side. The first died upon the place, and the other very well, and likely to do well. This..... as Dr. Croone says, may, if it takes, be of mighty use to man's health, for the amending of bad blood by borrowing from a better body'.

Dr. Croone, by the way, was my predecessor as Gresham Professor of Rhetoric in 1659. I hope I'm as good a prophet.

Such sanguine experiments, you'll be relieved to know, are not in my line. What is interesting however, is the origins of Gresham in a group of people at the dawn of the Age of Enlightenment with enormous intellectual curiosity equally interested in biology, chemistry, physics, art and architecture, and determined to understand them better in the cause of a better life for mankind.

I am therefore here this evening in order to try and build on this tradition with reference to the future of the city in the modern world, and in particular the role of London in the next century.

I was also intrigued by the activities of the recently established City Architecture Forum in which Gresham is a prime mover. It seemed possible that I could state problems in my Gresham lectures which would be useful subjects for debate at the Forum in the quest for solutions.

This is a time when interest in the culture of cities is a worldwide phenomenon. All the major cities of the world have problems of growth, organisation and management. In the developing world there is a crisis and nobody can see any way out. If you think we have problems here, take a look at Mexico City, Buenos Aires and Bombay. But that's another story.

Nevertheless the cities of the developed world must also face the challenge of growth and change - inner city impoverishment eats their hearts out, collapsing national and political boundaries and the exponential growth of information technology demand a reappraisal of their traditional roles in the hierarchy of region, nation and continent. The present state of Greater London and the City at its heart, presents these dilemmas in stark array. It has been described as a 'city under stress', and few would quarrel with that. Concern and activity is therefore growing and it is my intention in this inaugural lecture to look at where we are, how we're got here and how we might face the future more effectively. I am particularly keen to try and promote the function of Gresham College as a focus for this kind of enquiry and I shall come back to this later.

This is therefore a kind of trailer for a number of different trains of thought about the culture of cities which we can pursue through further lectures, seminars, presentations and media events according to the subject matter. I shall therefore try and resist the temptation to go into detail and simply raise issues in such a way as to rouse your curiosity without answering your questions. I hope in this way to discover what sort of audience there may be for future events so that we can, through dialogue, build up a body of informed interest which will be a force for future action.

What are the major lines of enquiry, what are the key issues ?

The first is that the design and management of cities is an essentially political process. Broadly speaking people in a democracy get the places to live in they deserve.

The second is that in a free market economy in land and property, environmental quality is heavily dependent on entrepreneurial judgements about maximising profit, minimising risk and securing a marketable reputation for patronage.

The third is that history shows that the image of a city reflects the aspirations and abilities of its people. The mechanism that drives this process is a mystery. But it

seems to be true that after the political and economic equations have been solved, the subtle catalyst of art and fashion works on the process to produce an aesthetic that is characteristic of the time. Until recently it has been possible to date any building in the City of London within a span of plus or minus ten years. The fact that this is getting more difficult by the day may be a worrying sign that architects are losing touch with their clients and the community and both are losing touch with history.

The modern movement in architecture reduced our architectural vocabulary to the aesthetic equivalent of four letter words and most of the results are now seen as bleak and impoverished. Now however we are confronted with dozens of different alphabets and everybody is confused and unsure.

This is perhaps symptomatic of the underlying dynamics of contemporary life which I referred to earlier. We live in a time of unprecedented instability in which the unknowns of economics and politics seem greater than ever.

Yet the places we love most were the products of relatively long established and stable societies and based on the apparent certainties of religious faith. Our skills as architects, planners and engineers derive from those times and we find it difficult to handle growth and change and to design confidently for impermanence. What then can we do to help ?

I have often asked myself what is the fundamental motive of our activities? I have come to the conclusion that our chief aim is to widen the range and variety of individual human choice. All the other objectives must be subsidiary to that.

We have to do this within certain constraints of course. Planning invariably involves the denial of somebody's freedom. Time and money are always in short supply.

Governments vary in the amount of individual liberty which they allow and in their susceptibility to political and financial pressures. Human and material resources have inevitable limits and we are all imperfect. Therefore we must accept the fact that planning for the future and making it happen is bound to be a compromise between our ideals, and the practical limits of politics, morality, economics and geography. There is thus no single best way of making things better, rather a series of more or less unsatisfactory muddles from which we hope to learn how to do better next time. I should say at this point that I don't separate planning from implementation and project management. They are a continuum. A plan which can't be implemented is worthless.

What I'm going to do therefore is to give you a brief resumé of my position in the field of planning and architecture by illustrating some projects which describe a small sample of my experience. I shall then look at some current projects in London, make some comparisons with the European competition, find some inspiration from the past and identify choices for the future.

During the first fifteen years after the last war, planning in Britain followed the lines laid down by the wartime coalition government during the years before victory.

The reconstruction of our bombed cities and the development of the new town programme which was designed to facilitate slum clearance in the big cities were controlled by rigid plans laying down patterns of land use and density supposedly for many years ahead.

The New Towns Act of 1945 was an important piece of legislation which provided for the setting up of a Development Corporation to manage the growth of each New Town. It was answerable to central not local government and was not elected. It was intended to be free to operate as far as possible according to the criteria of private enterprise. It was an acknowledgement, in effect, of the fact that an existing democratically elected local authority was not adequately equipped for the task of creating a new community. Although the Development Corporations themselves were successful, we became increasingly aware that the lack of flexibility inherent in this kind of rigid planning was slowing down post-war reconstruction and making it difficult for us to respond quickly to changing economic and social pressures.

#### L I G H T S    O F F

#### YORK

It was thus a wonderful opportunity to be presented thirty years ago with the challenge to design a new kind of micro-city in York in the shape of a new university.

Our task was to achieve a target population of 5,000 in ten years - by 1970.

It seems slow now, but it was a time of severe labour and material shortage and building was difficult.

Here was the chance of a lifetime to discover and apply techniques which would produce coherent plans that could grow and change and would fail safe against economic and other vicissitudes.

The site edged in green was on the fringe of the city between the built-up area and the little village of Heslington to the South-East. We identified, with our client, a triad of three building units to form the minimum viable university. We produced a theoretical structure of maximum symmetry. We then applied that to geography and time and identified a sequence of four phases for the construction of the university, based on an accretion of modular units going out from the existing village towards the city. The students arrived at one end and the builders left at the other. Flexibility has been adequate to accommodate radical academic changes and to support an increase in the student population above the target without disruption and within extremely stringent cost limits.

Our plan for the University said nothing about architecture in detail although it laid down a strategy of urban and landscape design. We created, simply, a flexible pattern of development relating growth and form to the academic and social aims of the university. It was up to individual architects in our office to do what they could with the opportunities provided by the Plan and to develop their own initiatives with the users of each building unit. We therefore set up a federation of separate but coordinated design teams. They were given a vocabulary to use but it was a flexible vocabulary of small lightweight prefabricated components very different from the large structural concrete panel systems which dominated the housing programme in the UK at that time.

The success of York has vindicated, for me, the idea that plans should be as free and unrestrictive as possible. They should lay down the minimum basic framework for development - and then leave it to the users, the project sponsors and the architects, to do the best they can to achieve architectural variety within the framework. Many physical plans are far too prescriptive, far too limiting, far too inhibiting. We need four dimensional planning techniques which can both cope with errors in forecasts and also make change easy in response to new economic and social demands. At the same time a strong and intelligible structure of urban design must be maintained.

#### CLNT

In the early 1960's when York was in full swing the demographers forecast a rapid rise in the UK population in the late 1970's. Panic set in and the government launched a second wave of New Towns - this time with emphasis on the north of the country. They had liked the York Plan and asked us to see if we could apply similar flexible modular techniques to a development strategy for what was not so much a New Town as a conurbation based on three existing towns to the north of Liverpool and Manchester.

There were already quarter of million people living there. Our job was to test the feasibility of doubling the population to form a new city of half a million.

We used a large sieve map process to generate a map of developability showing areas of maximum development potential and minimum cost (white), a middle ground of average opportunity (narrow stripes) and a final category (broad stripes) which was expensive, complicated and difficult.

The basic unit of development we designed was a 60,000 population increment with four 15,000 housing areas (orange) and four employment areas (red) dispersed around the centre (blue). This was served by a central public transport system (dotted line) and two parallel highspeed roads (solid line) with cross connections like the rungs of a ladder for district circulation. The theoretical 60,000 township was about eight km long and five km wide, and could easily connect to the existing towns with inexpensive improvements to the existing road network. The housing was low rise, low density because surveys showed that this was what the market demanded.

The whole effort which came to be known as the Central Lancashire New Town, was directed towards private investment creating a concentration of about two million people in central and northeast Lancashire with a lot of self-sustaining economic activity, acting as a counter-magnet to Manchester and Liverpool and giving those two old worn-out cities a breathing space in which to restructure themselves. The New Towns Act was used to set up a Development Corporation to manage the process. The Local Authorities will admit that they couldn't have managed this on their own.

#### DOCKLANDS

The chance to apply these lessons on a metropolitan scale came several years later in the context of London Docklands.

We were not dealing here with opportunities for coordinating and supporting the natural growth of existing communities but trying instead to solve the problems of urban decay and industrial dereliction in the heart of the capital city.

Three hundred years ago London's Docklands were marshes. By 1800 the River Thames had become the world's largest shipbuilding and trading centre and the local population had increased from 7,000 to 70,000 in 50 years. Congestion in the river led to the creation of the world's largest system of impounded docks and a big concentration of gas works fed by seaborne coal. This incidentally is Canary Wharf, of which more later.

Serious bomb damage during the second world war was the first herald of change. The second was the invention of the container for seaborne transport with all that it implied in the way of bigger ships and new methods of cargo handling and storage demanding large areas of flat land and good access to high speed roads. The third was the discovery of methane under the North Sea which made the coal-gas works redundant.

By 1951 Docklands had lost half a million people with jobs to match and by 1976 all the docks were closed and the gas works demolished. The whole episode had lasted only 300 years.

In 1971, the government (which was rightwing at the time) decided that something must be done to tackle what could be seen as a serious problem but, at the same time, could possibly be turned into an unprecedented opportunity for the future of London. What other capital city had 22 km<sup>2</sup> of land ripe for development at its centre ? The blue and red land was all owned by the government.

We were therefore commissioned by the government to make a study of the different ways in which this challenge could be met and to produce a number of different strategies for development with forecasts of costs and benefits attached. This is one of them. The theory was that we would present these choices to the people and the Government at the end of the study, and through a process of widespread consultation they would decide what should be done.

These hopes were dashed early on in our meetings with our client committee which consisted of the Government and 8 left wing local authorities. It was clear that we were never going to achieve a consensus. The local authorities were jealous and mistrustful of the government and indeed of one another because they were in competition to attract scarce jobs back to the area of the sort which had been lost with the disappearing docks and gasworks.

Early in the study we came to the conclusion that some sort of implementing authority was needed which would be answerable to central government and could over-ride the quarrels of the local authorities in the long term interest of the nation.

Alas, before we had time to achieve this we were overtaken by larger events. Widespread industrial unrest, the three day working week, power cuts and black-outs took the stage and before long the Government capitulated and Harold Wilson took up the reins again on behalf of socialism in March 1974.

The new government set up a Joint Committee made up of the people who had so signally failed to give us positive direction 3 years earlier. The main thing they achieved

was a programme to demolish the old warehouses and fill the docks. This actually reduced the value of the land thereby created because it destroyed the unique environmental asset of the area - its enormous sheets of impounded water.

Ironically it took a right wing government, elected in 1979, with Mrs Thatcher as Prime Minister and Michael Heseltine as Secretary of State for the Department of the Environment to break the deadlock and set up a London Docklands Development Corporation.

The long years of inaction and stagnation had seriously depressed land values. In some areas they were actually negative in the sense that it was not possible to give the land away. 8,500 jobs had been lost in the five years from 1976-1981 and unemployment stood at 20%.

The government appointed a Board of eleven Directors and I was the member representing environmental issues and acting as Chairman of the Planning Committee which had powers of control over all development and responsibility for setting standards of architecture and urban design.

We had jurisdiction over 2064 hectares of land and water measuring 11.5 km from west to east.

The Government gave us the objective "To redress the housing, social and environment, employment, economic and communications deficiencies of the Docklands and the Parent Boroughs, and thereby to provide the stimulus for similar improvement through East London".

We were given all the publicly owned land in the area - mainly derelict docks and gasworks - and powers of compulsory purchase over the rest with compensation decided independently. This ability to assemble land is crucial to the achievement of coordinated development.

Our other great strength was that we had access to government funds for the provision of a new services infrastructure, and better public and private transport linkages to the city network.

Our economic difficulties of the 1970's were increasingly seen to be partly due to a planning system which was inflexible, negative, slow and inhibitory. During the last decade there has therefore been a drive towards planning which is more flexible and is directed towards the positive encouragement of enterprise and development.

We therefore saw ourselves in Docklands as conducting an experiment in stimulating development rather than inhibiting it; the administrators of incentives rather than controls. Our top priority was to achieve economic growth and provide jobs.

One example of the techniques we adopted to do this is the Docklands Light Railway - £77m of transport for which no demand existed when it was built, but which is now overloaded. We saw its value as a promotional symbol for the connection of an isolated part of London to the City's Metro System.

Another example is the creation of an enterprise zone (shown in yellow) in the more unattractive parts of our area in which developers would be free of planning control and given a ten year holiday from certain substantial taxes.

A third is the promotion of development, not through the imposition of fixed land use plans but by invitation to developers to make bids to lease land for construction on the basis of a general description of the kind of development looked for, together with a set of urban design guidelines which describe a more or less flexible range of physical limits to which the development is to conform.

There is no doubt about the economic success of these policies so far. Land values increased by 1985 from £13 /ha to £186/ha for housing and from £28/ha to £396/ha for commercial development - factors of 14 times.

By 1987 £2,242m of private investment had been achieved at the expense of £294m of government investment - a leverage of 9:1. By 1989 this had increased to 12.5:1. By 1986 10,000 new jobs had come into the area and this is expected to rise to 50,000 by 1991 as current projects are completed and occupied. In 1981 the resident population of the area was 40,000. It is estimated that this will have risen to 115,000 by the end of the century.

The earliest projects were warehouse conversions, first to flats, then to commercial activities - shops, restaurants, offices and small workshops.

We have restored many historic buildings such as St George's in the East by Hawksmoor.

New housing for sale or to rent is mainly low density along the waterside. Cascades is a rare example of high building - most people seem to want to live near the ground.

The business district in the early days was unimpressive - confidence was still shaky. Improvements in transport were added to the Light Railway such as London City Airport and a River Bus service with new piers.

All this was leading up, although we didn't know it, to the  
BIG BANG.

This was the Canary Wharf Project for 1m m<sup>2</sup> of office and shopping space in 10 years. A North American developer presented the proposals out of the blue and took our collective breath away. It would produce 40,000 new jobs and double the local tax revenue. So long as we could achieve a reasonable quality of urban design - and I think we've done that - it was exactly what the Development Corporation had been created to achieve - a phoenix rising from the ashes of the Blitz.

Opinions are sharply divided as you might expect - is it overdevelopment, what effects will it have on the historic City of London, have we produced variety or chaos? Have we produced an integrated community or a breeding ground for civil unrest? Whatever the judgement on these matters, it cannot be denied that we have so far reached our top priority objective - the creation of new economic activity and an image of growth to take the place of dereliction. The map shows areas of new development up to 1988 in red - completed or in progress.

But the local people are not pleased. Their chief grievance is that their interests have been ignored in the drive for financial success. The Corporation has responded by making an agreement with the Local Authorities to make a significant contribution (£51m in 1989/90) to the costs of social services. This includes large sums for education and training, health and social services and leisure and community facilities. The developers have also made their contribution.

The second grievance is in the housing field. The Local Boroughs are among the poorest in the land and many of their people live in slums. They also hate living in high flats. They thus naturally resent the private housing promoted by the Corporation which is being sold and rented at prices which the local people can't afford.

The Corporation has therefore allocated money for the refurbishment of old public housing as well as the building of new housing at rents which can be afforded by poorer people and the support of self-build housing schemes.

What about the impact of all this on the rest of London?

LONDON

During the early 1980's the City Corporation produced a draft Development Plan which was oriented very much towards the conservation of what was left of the pre-war street pattern and a low density low building policy for redevelopment. Uproar ensued. The City was for nothing if it wasn't for making money. How could it take advantage of the liberalisation of the money market and compete successfully with its international rivals within such a planning straitjacket?

Here is an example where public consultation made a difference for once - it even led to a change of Planning Officer, an upward revision of plot ratios and a much more open handed and less restrictive attitude to developers.

I'm not sure about the chronology but it was about this time that the Docklands Development Corporation was established and began to develop momentum. It was unfortunately seen by the City as a threat to its new planning policies and while I was on the Docklands Board our efforts to establish a collaborative relationship for the good of London as a whole were not welcomed.

Meanwhile the City got on with it and amongst other things, Broadgate happened. Taking advantage of a rationalisation of railway land and in partnership with British Rail, the developers, Rosehaugh Stanhope, have produced a piece of coherent urban design which is at present leading the field. Outstanding in its patronage of architecture and art of quality by Arup Associates and Skidmore Owings and Merrill (whether you like it or not) it also generates enjoyable space in the public domain without, presumably, damaging its commercial viability. It would be interesting to know how this is done since so many other developers seem to find it a difficult trick to perform.

On the other hand, like so much of the City, it is very much a nine to five, Monday to Friday, place not at all enjoyable in the evenings and at weekends - whereas the Barbican, like the South Bank, is a fine place for a family outing on Sunday. Why did we abandon the brave effort at the Barbican to bring living back into the City. Was it a failure? - If so, why?

Other attempts to achieve a more rounded and better balanced inner city development are being made not far away from Broadgate but at the moment it is difficult to be optimistic.

Paternoster - the St Paul's precinct - is shrouded in mysteries of land ownership and rumours of Royal intervention. We don't even know what the mix of uses is going to be.

Early plans for the King's Cross site met with vociferous objections by the local community and appear now to be held up by indecision over the routing of the Channel Tunnel rail link and an unrealistic planning brief from Camden Council.

Spitalfields Market was the site of a brave attempt by Richard McCormac to introduce more housing and smaller scale commercial activity embedded in the bulk of office accommodation in line with the wishes of the local population. The first scheme was abandoned as uncommercial, too expensive and difficult to let and manage and has been

replaced by a more orthodox solution. The Secretary of State decided to call this in for a public inquiry which promises to be an interesting source of information on the workings of the property market and the difficulty of affording low cost housing without public subsidy.

Efforts are also being made by Hunt Thompson to plan the redevelopment of the site of Bishopsgate Goods Yard through an exercise in community enterprise called 'Planning for Real' involving local people in deciding on the location of different uses and the choice of urban form. The office content has been isolated in a corner of the site next to a new transport interchange and affection for the street as a flexible, friendly and safe module of urban structure is noticeable. The future of this scheme is also uncertain.

Are we to conclude that differences between social and commercial interests are irreconcilable? We seem to be struggling to interlock two different socio-economic systems. One is based on the concentration of work separated from the places where people want to live and depending on commuting for its viability. The other assumes a more integrated community living over the workshop. Both seem to be necessary to community health and economic survival. Why can't we provide for both?

This is but one symptom of the syndrome I mentioned earlier - "the signs of a city under stress" - to quote a highly reputable source from the world of property. It goes on to mention "roads choked with traffic, a rail system underfunded and overloaded, an inadequate office stock, house prices beyond the means of key workers and more recently, labour shortages".

I would add the shameful neglect of our major cultural monuments - the symbols of pride and confidence in ourselves - such as the failure to proceed with the long overdue improvement of the Royal Opera House, the fiasco of the National Gallery Extension and the muddle over providing a new setting for St Pauls.

We don't have to go far to find a city that seems to be doing better in many respects than we are, and bids fair to take our place before the end of the century as the capital of Europe.

#### PARIS

Paris has its problems and they are very similar to ours, but as a visitor I find it extremely enjoyable and easy to get about in. And there are one or two things going on there from which we can maybe learn a thing or two.

The Mayor Jacques Chirac set up in 1986 a permanent centre for information, exhibition and documentation about the city. It is called the Pavillon de l'Arsenal and reflects in Chirac's words 'an act of faith in our architects and town planners' capacity to promote the genius of France'. It's magnificent catalogue provides a reference to hundreds of new buildings in Paris as well as the 'Neuf Grands Projects'.

You've all heard of them, of course, and I haven't time this evening to talk about them at length. But here is a sample, as a foretaste:

First of all, the redevelopment of Les Halles, like the Centre Pompidou was a precursor of the realisation that Paris had to protect its heritage better - the demolition of Baltard's iron markets had created a storm of protest - and there was the bicentenary of the Revolution coming up in 1989 - something to celebrate indeed. So here is a new park on top of an underground city and marrying very well with Saint Eustache and the neighbourhood.

The demolition of Les Halles focussed attention on the Gare d'Orsay - long abandoned as a railway terminus and ripe for redevelopment. In the nick of time the inspired decision was taken to turn it into a Gallery for the exhibition of art and architecture of 19th and early 20th century France.

On the opposite bank of the Seine, the Louvre is being comprehensively reorganised and rejuvenated to exhibit its long stored treasures in an enjoyable and intelligible environment. What was a warren like maze is now transformed into a piece of clarity by a brilliant piece of subterranean organisation surmounted by I. M. Pei's glass pyramid.

Let us pass over La Grande Arche at La Defense and the new 2,700 seat opera house in the Place de la Bastille and finish up with La Vilette.

Here is a grand scale celebration of art and science on the remains of a 19th century abbattoir and cattle market. To the north the 'Cité des Sciences et de l'Industrie', to the south the 'Cité de la Musique'. Between them the Géode - a wrap around cinema, a concert hall for rock music seating 6,700 and an exhibition hall and conference centre; the whole set in a new park. So Paris gets a new Science Museum, a new Conservatoire and a 1,200 seat concert hall.

We did something like this forty years ago. It was called the Festival of Britain. On the South Bank of the Thames, only a few years after the end of the war we celebrated our survival and our hopes for the future in a demonstration of native heritage and enterprise displayed in the best of British architecture, engineering, art and design. It was enormously popular and lifted our hearts to face a daunting future of austerity. All we have left is the Festival Hall and nothing remotely like it has happened since.

LIGHTS ON

What's to be done ?

FUTURE ACTION

There are many encouraging signs that popular opinion is stirring. I mention just a few.

A week ago last Saturday (17 November) the London Forum of Greater London Amenity Societies held a Conference called 'The Tale of Two Cities - London & Paris'. It discussed the politics of city management and examined in some depth the reasons for the relatively better performance of Paris.

On November 8th an enthusiastic meeting sponsored by the Architects' Journal was held at the Royal Society of Arts to launch a 'Vision for London' Festival in 1991. It is intended that it will culminate in the establishment of a permanent planning and architecture centre for London. The organisers have discovered that more than 50 activities on this theme are planned for next year.

For the last three years the Urban Design Group has been seeking support for a National Urban Design Centre based on the Polytechnic of Central London.

The RIBA London Region is forming an association with its opposite number in Paris.

The Presidents of the RIBA and RTPI are setting up a joint working group to make proposals for the better government of London.

There is a growing consensus that the government of London has been drifting dangerously since the abolition of the GLC. The London Planning Advisory Committee does its best but it has no executive powers and little money, and can safely be ignored both by Central Government and the nine different planning authorities that have jurisdiction over the central business district.

I quote again from my impeccable source in the property business; "We need to develop a planning system which places as much emphasis on London's strengths as overcoming its weaknesses. If not, London is in real danger of losing its position as Europe's top financial centre".

As I said at the beginning, planning is politics. Improving London means doing something about the way it is managed. Is it too much to hope that Gresham College could initiate a review of the government of Greater London ? It is an apolitical body and could therefore establish neutral relations with the other bodies involved. Another option is

a Royal Commission but that implies a lot of time and money and I have the strong intuition that with 1992 only two Christmases away, time is not on our side.

If that is crying for the moon, the least we could do is to provide a meeting point for the initiatives I have described where some of the questions I have raised could be explored further. It is important that we should talk to one another more and since so many different skills and disciplines are involved, a neutral ground like Gresham College may be more acceptable than a particular professional institution.

Finally, what about another Festival of Britain in 2001 to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Great Exhibition ? It is only ten years away and that gives us enough time to get it properly planned. And who better to oversee it than Prince Charles in the same way that Prince Albert undertook the Presidency of the Royal Commission for the Great Exhibition in 1851 ?

# ***GRESHAM COLLEGE***

## **Policy & Objectives**

An independently funded educational institution, Gresham College exists

- to continue the free public lectures which have been given for 400 years, and to reinterpret the 'new learning' of Sir Thomas Gresham's day in contemporary terms;
- to engage in study, teaching and research, particularly in those disciplines represented by the Gresham Professors;
- to foster academic consideration of contemporary problems;
- to challenge those who live or work in the City of London to engage in intellectual debate on those subjects in which the City has a proper concern; and to provide a window on the City for learned societies, both national and international.

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