

## 2019 - COTAC Diamond Jubilee [Background Note No 1] 10 June 2019

As readers may know COTAC celebrates its 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary this year, 2019. Using papers from our archives this article is the first of a series which traces the founding of the organisation and its progress in the early years.

Established as the Conference on Architectural Education, the first meeting was held in the then SPAB offices at 55 Great Ormond Street WC1 on 10<sup>th</sup> February 1959. The meeting was chaired by the Dean of Gloucester, S J A Evans, who was also Chairman of the Central Council of the Care of Churches (CCCC). The CCCC had taken the initiative to call the meeting following a number of suggestions worthy of further consideration that were made during a conference of architects that it organised in 1958 with the cooperation of the RIBA and SPAB, hosted at the York Institute of Advanced Architectural Studies.

Attended by nearly 100 architects that conference probably engaged with the largest number of professionals that had yet come together to discuss concerns over the repair and maintenance of historic buildings, and the need for specialised training in the field. As a result, CCCC took the lead in calling for the February 1959 gathering. Representatives included those from Gloucester Cathedral, SPAB, York Institute, CPRE, London County Council (LCC) Historic Buildings, National Trust, Historic Churches Preservation Trust (HCPT), RIBA and the Georgian Group. Invited to send representatives, they all had a direct or indirect responsibility for the repair and maintenance of old buildings and for their adaptation to modern needs, be this as owner or custodian, those offering advice to owners or as administrators of grant aid for such work. All were believed to share a common concern at the:

- Shortage of architectural students interested in such work
- Lack of encouragement to students to take it up, owing to the
- Absence of systematic instruction on the subject in most architectural schools
- Fact that the country offered no post-graduate qualification at that time, and
- That there was no question on the subject in the RIBA final examination.

However, all present appreciated the work to provide part-time training by the SPAB, the Institute of Advanced Architectural Studies at York and the Bartlett School in London, but it was clear that more needed to be done. Views were then sought from delegates upon proposals summarised in the agenda, the accompanying note, and the additional paper on post graduate training submitted by Mr W A Eden of London County Council, Historic Buildings Division.

In course of debate it became evident that members felt:

- a) More effective means needs to be found for arousing interest in the subject by students but not too much should be attempted at that stage to avoid over specialisation
- b) That any effective training must be given in formal post-graduate courses of at least one, probably two years duration
- c) That candidates were more likely to come from schools (architectural) that give a prominence to historical studies during the normal five years of training. It was agreed that the concentration on preparation of measured drawings and study of traditional buildings from point of view of design and construction, could not be made a substitute for a post-graduate course.
- d) That it would be an encouragement to the schools to give more emphasis to this subject and to students to feel that such studies were worth pursuing, if there could be a paper/question included as an optional paper in the RIBA final examinations.

Attention then turned to Mr Eden who expanded upon his paper on post-graduate training.

Several members emphasised the poor financial return which historic building work achieved and were anxious that - unless architects were going to spend all their lives in local government or the civil service - in order to make a living and develop their aesthetic and practical experience they needed to build up a balanced general practice. Since it was unlikely that grants would be available for support of students taking a further course of study, it would be necessary for them to work part-time in the offices of architects (either local government, ministry or private practices) where such work was carried out.

It was felt that it was not necessarily a good thing for two years to be spent on a post-graduate course to be accepted as the 'period of practice' between the finals and election to Associateship (which would be required after 1961). It was suggested that in order not to defer qualification unduly, the course might be accepted in lieu of one year's practice.

It was unanimously agreed that for the course to be effectual, it must be based on actual repair work in progress and, on the theoretic side, must include documentary sources of architectural history; law relating to protection of ancient buildings; grant aid available for their repair, and planning of conversions to meet local authority standards. The meeting were pleased to hear that conversations had already been opened with the Court of the University of London with a view to starting a diploma course, such as Mr Eden proposed. To give the course exceptional status, it was suggested that the Royal Academy School might provide an additional or alternative centre, and might also provide help with the costs of providing tuition and accommodation.

The meeting considered, and Mr Eden agreed, that some further discussion of details of the outlined programme would be useful on giving consideration to the alternative venue, and that calling it had been fully justified by the value of the discussion that had taken place. It was further agreed to call another meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> April 1959 and appoint a Sub-committee to explore the proposals and report back. The proposals to be considered were:

1. *That a summer school for public school boys and others considering taking an architectural training might be of value in encouraging interest.*
2. *That some jointly sponsored propaganda might be arranged in the architectural schools, aimed at making students aware of demand for men with an informed interest in and knowledge of the repair of old buildings.*
3. *That means might be found for obtaining and registering centrally the names of men who had shown aptitude for or had specialised in the historical side during their training.*
4. *That approach be made to the RIBA on the possibility of getting a paper on some aspect of repair or adaptation of existing buildings included in the final examination.*
5. *That the organisation and syllabus of Mr Eden's proposed post-graduate course should be examined in greater detail and means proposed for advancing the scheme.*

The sub-committee was to consist of Mr Eden, Dr Singleton, Mr Reed, Mr Sisson and Mr Insall (Secretary) and they agreed to meet on 25<sup>th</sup> February 1960.

Mr Insall, now Sir Donald Insall, was Secretary of the Sub-committee and subsequently became the Secretary of COTAC for over 30 years. He then served as a COTAC Trustee for many years thereafter.

Whilst we continue to wrestle with many similar issues today, what has changed is a greater acceptance of a more sensitive and balanced approach to the issue of gender across the professions and the use of more PC language in discussions and records! Scans of the full minutes of the meeting (typewritten on foolscap paper) are attached as below.

Graham Lee

Story to be continued:

Draft invitation letter to attend the meeting on 10.02.59

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