

## LFMC RELOCATION PROJECT

### Introduction

Since well before the expiry of our lease on 42, Gloucester Avenue in 1987, the LFMC has been faced with the problem of relocation. Initially the struggle was one of finding premises with the limited rent available (£6,600) in our annual revenue grant. This proved impossible in central London.

Feasibility studies for sharing premises with LVA were carried out, resulting in a detailed report produced by Practical Arts in July 1990. This report concluded that both LFMC and LVA required formal structures to be negotiated and conscious commitment of the LFMC and LVA for the operation to be successful and the benefit of sharing premises to be realised. A financial commitment from the BFI and/or GLA would also be required to progress any option.

It was only with the demise of GLA, the formulation of the LAB (London Arts Board) and most recently (May 17th '91) the proposed LFVDA (London Film and Video Development Agency) that such funding became a possibility, though the LAB and LFVDA may themselves be at odds over who might fund what, and more importantly, which body would actually receive the funds to disburse.

We are lead to believe that the space rental in the Dunn & Co. building option investigated, is approx. £150,000 p.a. including service charges. Hence the BFI through the LFVDA would be putting an enormous subsidy towards the rental of 2 floors (LFMC/LVA) in that building.

With this rental figure in mind, the choice of buildings on offer increased dramatically. It is at this point that our Building Committee came to life. A diary of salient points is attached.

An alternative building at 29/31, Saffron Hill, EC1, was viewed by the Building Committee, who felt so positive about its potential that everyone available was invited to view it (17 members from LFMC). All expressed a preference for this building. The BFI were informed of our unanimous preference. But the BFI, advised by RPM (the relocation agents), persisted with their interest in the Dunn & Co. building. For this reason, the Building Committee and Executive recommend a full debate of the issues involved, at a General Meeting.

M.L./Sept.10th '91

See diary (Background History), building comparison and conclusions enclosed. For full information, all documentation and correspondence is available for members' reference at the LFMC.

## **Dunn & Co/Saffron Hill compared:**

### **The buildings:**

**Dunn & Co** - originally two buildings facing different streets with a yard/light well between. At some time their street facades have been rebuilt so that the windows do not match the floor levels, a situation at its worst on the first and second floors, where LVA & LFMC will be located. The light well has been floored in, so that the only sources of daylight and natural ventilation (apart from a tiny ventilation shaft) are the inadequate windows on the street facades. The refurbishment proposed by the building owner/RPM involves major structural alterations, all new staircases, two new lifts and other large items, all of presently unknown cost and lengthy duration, to be financed with a finite lump sum made available by the building owner at the outset of the tenancy. It is not yet clear who will be responsible for deciding how this money is spent. This building presents many design problems, and the BFI have only recently asked an architect to look at the project to envisage how it might be realised. The landlord's change of use to offices contravenes Camden's planning policy (hence the BFI's value to them as a tenant) and planning permission may be difficult to obtain. The cinema would be on the first floor.

**Saffron Hill** - a building of four storeys & basement with natural light and ventilation back and front, views out, existing staircase and lift, and a possible roof terrace. Any alterations would be minor, straightforward and quick. It is possible that planning permission (for change of use) would not be required. The cinema could have been on the ground floor.

### **The tenure:**

**Dunn & Co** - the landlord would be the freeholder (i.e. foreseeable rent increases), who will be one of the occupiers of the building.

**Saffron Hill** - initially, a tenancy was available from the holder of a 21 year sub-lease, but after discussion, the holder of the head lease (69 years) offered a tenancy with a rent profile equally foreseeable to that at Dunn & Co, and rather cheaper.

### **The location:**

**Dunn & Co** - inner suburban, midway between Camden Town and Kentish Town tube stations (5 - 10 mins walk each) on the same (Northern) line, several bus routes. Noisy, but visible - on a main road. There would be office users (including the landlord) above; retail and catering (fire risk/grease/smells?) below, and flats next door.

**Saffron Hill** - central, 2 mins to Farringdon tube, other stations nearby, several bus routes. Quiet, but one block away from a main street. BFI/LFMC/LVA would be sole occupiers, with similar commercial buildings on either side.

In short, while both options were feasible, we thought the Dunn & Co building likely to generate unforeseen difficulties and delays which would lead to an unsatisfactory result.

## BACKGROUND HISTORY/ LFMC RELOCATION

12th January AGM - vote by majority to confirm LFMC practice that major items affecting the future direction of the LFMC be debated and decided by the membership at a General Meeting.

9th March EGM - election of new executive committee.

16th May (?) - new building viewed by 2 staff members.

23rd May Executive Meeting - no information about this new development.

2nd June EGM - no report to membership on new building.

13th June Executive Meeting - Admin. report - 'Dunn & Co.' to be 'signed up' by end of month. First mention of 'Dunn & Co.' to executive. No address or other information  
Committee alarmed. Seek to find out more after meeting.

3rd July - first viewing of Dunn & Co. for executive and others. Express grave doubts to RPM (BFI's agents) as to building's suitability. First floor. Absence of light. Low ceilings. Cramped triangular cinema space. No view out. Disabled access problem. Lot of work.

10th July Emergency Executive Meeting - Discuss Dunn & Co. reservations. Sandy/Tom say BFI want immediate affirmative decision. Executive refuse. Complain at lack of information. Sandy says there is nothing in writing yet. Form new Building Committee. Martin to chair. BFI to be invited to next week's executive meeting. LFMC/LVA meeting to be arranged next week with second viewing Dunn & Co..

11th July - Executive members find FAX of letter to BFI dated 19th June from Doug Foot (LVA) and Sandy Weiland (LFMC) on office floor. Letter invites Wilf Stevenson (Director/BFI) to view new building. Speaks of consensus LVA/LFMC. Gives impression that LFMC are pro Dunn & Co. Nothing in File on Dunn & Co. Exec. members complain.

*Week beginning 15th July (?) - Wilf Stevenson views Dunn & Co.  
Executive don't know about this till much later.*

16th July - Second viewing Dunn & Co. LFMC/LVA & others. Reservations again expressed to RPM and LVA. RPMS's new plans don't overcome basic problems.

17th July - Martin views 5 other buildings to see what's around.

18th July Executive Meeting - (17 members present) BFI/RPM/ACGB attend. Paper on reservations over Dunn & Co. submitted. RPM/BFI told 2 other buildings seen which better than Dunn & Co. RPM invite LFMC to visit and discuss. BFI say have already paid RPM total relocation fee (£20,000). No other relocation money available. BFI are going ahead with Dunn & Co. irrespective of LFMC decision. Ian Christie advises LFMC to draw up reservations and concerns in any reply. BFI then leave. Several members object to crucial vote at such short notice when so many don't like Dunn & Co.

*what do they  
do in between?*

1. Vote on suitability Dunn & Co. for LFMC Cinema (0 For 10 Against 5 abstentions). 2. Because no apparent choice, Vote to move to Stage 2 with Dunn & Co. (7 For 3 Against). Majority ask it to be minuted that "this decision was taken under great pressure and the BFI should be aware of that". Executive called early next week to draft reply to BFI and requirements to which vote subject. Complaints voiced about not informing executive of advanced developments and sending of 19th June letter to Wilf Stevenson without authority.

*19th July - On advice of Irene Whitehead (BFI). Martin sees RPM who already have details on Saffron Hill. Not understood why RPM hadn't shown it to LFMC/LVA.*

*23rd July Emergency Executive Meeting (12 present) - compose reply to BFI (re. 18th meeting) with conditions to be attached to vote. Composition of Building Committee is confirmed.*

*30th July - Building Committee view Saffron Hill. Contact Jim Pines (BFI).*

*31st July - 2nd August 23 members LFMC/LVA, Jim Pines (BFI), Dave Curtis (ACGB) view Saffron Hill, (full knowledge LFMC). Overwhelming preference.*

*1st August - Irene Whitehead returns to London. Receives letter from LFMC executive of 26th July (Dunn & Co. vote and attached conditions) on same day as new details on Saffron Hill.*

*2nd August - Building Committee report LFMC preference for Saffron Hill to Jim Pines. Colin McCabe (BFI) independently contacts Wilf Stevenson who calls meeting with Irene Whitehead/Jim Pines (BFI).*

*5th August - Wilf Stevenson advises that RPM are now instructed to look into both buildings. Irene Whitehead advises same.*

*6th August Full Meeting of Executive/Building Committee/Members (12 present, 2 letters, 3 messages) - to compose letter which "unanimously expressed a strong preference for Saffron Hill". Asks BFI for an urgent meeting to discuss and seriously consider this new option. Letter includes lists of those present, those who viewed Saffron Hill, those on Building Committee and remit of Building Committee.*

*6th August - Letter to BFI from LVA stating LVA interest in Saffron Hill.*

*7th August - LFMC receive RPM Saffron Hill report with 6th August letter from I. Whitehead (BFI). RPM advising against Saffron Hill. RPM report is full of holes. RPM have not enquired accurate details, planning, rent etc..*

*8th August - Building Committee/LVA Meeting. Exciting offer comes in from Leaseholder/Saffron Hill. Makes Saffron Hill rent arrangements better than Dunn & Co. (approx. £40,000 p.a. cheaper!). FAX these new details to BFI.*

*9th August - Patrick Keiller (LFMC) delegated to call Irene. She arranges to view Saffron Hill with RPM and Patrick on 12th August. Calls back later. Doesn't want Patrick with them.*

10th August - Crucial letter/2nd July from Wilf Stevenson (BFI) about his intended visit to Dunn & Co. discovered with letters from RPM in office.

12th August - Building Committee document comparing Saffron Hill/Dunn & Co. delivered to Irene Whitehead. BFI view Saffron Hill with RPM (Irene Whitehead, Jim Pines, Steve McIntyre). In spite of all facts presented, BFI letter to LFMC says "continuing with Dunn & Co." Without offering consultation with LFMC or giving any reasons against Saffron Hill.

13th August - Independent letter from Patrick Keiller to Irene advising to seek professional advice (architects/quantities surveyors) re. complexities of design and costing of project.

14th August - Building Committee meet. Letter to Irene (BFI). Relaying disappointment at lack of dialogue over Saffron Hill and LFMC reservations on Dunn & Co.

19th August - BFI call meeting. No space on agenda for LFMC views.

22nd August Emergency Executive Meeting - Building Committee recommend that Executive call General Meeting in light of information/events since 18th July. (See Proposals). Questions drawn up to put to BFI meeting.

27th August Meeting BFI/LVA/LFMC Building Committee - BFI advised of LFMC decision to call General Meeting. BFI give information conflicting with 18th July position. BFI will not move to Dunn & Co. without LFMC. Though architects would now be involved. still unclear info. about Dunn & Co. rent/lease/time-scale arrangements etc. Close of meeting, BFI state Dunn & Co. project will now be called off.

diary compiled September 1991

CURRENT BUILDING COMMITTEE - Martin Lugg (chair), Annabel Nicolson, Steve Farrer, Patrick Keiller, Ilias Pantos (Anna Thew standing in for Annabel Nicolson whilst away)

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (current to this diary) - Mark Sheehan (chair), Tanya Syed, James Hutchinson, Karen Smith (to 23rd July), Paul Rodgers, Anna Thew, Emina Kurtagic, Gina Czarnecki, Martin Lugg. (non-staff)  
Tony Warcus, Sandy Weiland, Vicki Smith, Tom Heslop (to 5th July), John Tappenden. (staff)

continued over ....

## CONCLUSIONS

1. that the LFMC is not in a position to provide sufficient information for the membership to make an 'informed decision' on the Dunn & Co. option. Therefore any vote will of necessity be subject to satisfactory lease arrangements, rent and rental reviews or guarantees, acceptable contract negotiations regarding LFMC's involvement in the design of the space and eventual control over the LFMC area (autonomy).
2. that for reasons outside our control the Dunn & Co. option may fall through because of its complexity (see report). Therefore it is considered a high risk option.
3. that the fixed sum of £375,000 offered by the developer for complete re-furbishment (incl. lifts, stairwells etc.) and fitting out of LFMC/LVA/LFVDA space, may result in a very low specification solution to save the project.
4. that we cannot recommend the RPM company to carry out any architectural design and management role from this stage forward and hope that the membership will seriously consider this view.
5. that there are serious drawbacks with the Dunn & Co. building in respect of:
  - a. the cinema/exhibition space/shooting studio/multiple use function.
  - b. the availability of natural light in our LFMC workspace.
  - c. the available space and height for other exhibition areas.
6. that there is such an enormous range of other property available on reasonable terms, that the Dunn & Co. building is not the only choice open to the BFI.
7. that whatever the outcome of a General Meeting, the opening up of an alternative option has achieved a better deal on both the Dunn & Co. site and on the Saffron Hill building and the possibility of more design and control input for the LFMC. The BFI's recognition of the importance of the LFMC flexible Cinema space now figures higher on the agenda.
8. that the main fear in this whole project, is the massive increase in LFMC dependence on the BFI. It is inevitable that strings will be attached to this dependence, leading to a very much greater pressure on the LFMC to generate income and to adopt more industrial practices (see MDA/LFVDA paper May 17th '91).

The Dunn & Co. site requires annual subsidy rise from £58,850 to £127,000

29/31 Saffron Hill       "       "       "       "       "       £58,850 to £107,000

based on the assumed LFMC portion of rented space alone.

This dependence is a problem with either building. We feel, however that the Saffron Hill option would provide a better space, with better income-earning potential and less dependence.