

# ARCHITECTS' JOURNAL

20 January, 2011

## Docklands pioneer Reg Ward dies

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*Albert Joseph Reginald Ward, local government executive and urbanist, born 5 October 1927; died 6 January 2011*

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*Reg Ward with Michael Heseltine*  
*Source:*

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*Docklands View*

### **The 'legendary' Reg Ward was the Father of the Docklands**, *writes David Donoghue*

**Reg Ward, the chief executive of the London Docklands Development Corporation (LDDC) from 1981 to 1987 has died aged 83.**

Ward devised and saw through the plans for the Docklands Light Railway (DLR), London City Airport, the Royal Docks, Surrey Quays, the ExCel Centre and Canary Wharf.

The controversial quango was set up by Michael Heseltine in Margaret Thatcher's government in 1981 in response to the drastic economic decline of London's docks. Its remit extended six miles downriver from Tower Bridge and covered parts of Southwark, Newham and Tower Hamlets. At the time, unemployment stood at 17.8 per cent 10,000 jobs had been lost in just three years and 60 per cent of the area was derelict.

Attempts by the local councils and the GLC to revive the area had become totally moribund. Heseltine gave the new body both planning control and the resources to 'make things happen'. He appointed leading developer Nigel Broackes to chair the body; Bob Mellish, a veteran local Labour MP, as deputy chairman and Reg Ward as chief executive.

For nine months Reg was the only member of staff. From the outset it was clear that his vision was far and away more ambitious than the original expectations of some decent houses and a few small work premises. Whilst he got on famously well with Broackes, Mellish and Heseltine, his vision and persistence did not sit well with civil servants or the local authorities. However,

he is now viewed as the main driver behind the extraordinary ongoing change and development in London Docklands.

Thousands of jobs and homes have been delivered together with massive infrastructure and transport benefits, including the Jubilee Line and the Riverbus. His admirers claim that London would never have won the bid for the 2012 Olympic Games had not Ward battled vigorously for better transport links in the East End. Lord Heseltine said: "He was an outstanding success and it led to one of the world's outstanding regeneration projects. His energy was proverbial, his imagination huge. I greatly enjoyed working with him. Reg made a great contribution to the redevelopment of the East End. We owe him a great debt".

The son of a miner, Albert Joseph Reginald Ward was born on October 5 1927 in the Forest of Dean and educated at East Dean Grammar School at Cinderford, Gloucestershire. He studied Medieval History, then Fine Art and Architecture, at Manchester University. He became a tax inspector and in his mid-30s worked for Lancashire County Council. He then rose through the ranks of local government, becoming chief executive of the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, and later of Hereford and Worcester County Council. He served as a member of the Duke of Edinburgh's Commission into Housing 1986-7 and became a Fellow of the University of London and of the Royal Society for the Arts.

In 1982 I stood alone with Reg on an empty Canary Wharf on what is now the base of Canary Wharf tower – One Canada Square. We were the only people to be seen for miles around. No workers, no visitors, no-one passing through and it was eerily quiet. Today there are over 120,000 people working there. Some success.

We were there looking to launch Limehouse Television studios. Limehouse and Richard Desmond's Northern & Shell were the first major companies to move into the newly-designated Isle of Dogs Enterprise Zone. Limehouse was an instant success and attracted VIPs, celebrities and leading politicians despite appalling transport and traffic problems. These included a US banker, Michael von Clemm, who suggested a new financial centre be created there. Ward jumped on this and the resulting scheme became the Canary Wharf development. After several hiccups a contract was eventually signed with Paul Reichmann, of the Canadian property developers Olympia and York, in 1987.

Ward's greatest achievement was to persuade hard-nosed City and property investors that a Docklands revival really was going to work. While initially the media, property industry and even the LDDC board were cynical, it was Ward's unremitting persistence - and brilliant marketing - that won the day.

Reg stepped down from the job of chief executive in September 1987. He set up his own consultancy to work on a number of major regeneration projects around the world including the Olympic cities Barcelona and Sydney before being appointed to head the regeneration of St Kitts in the Caribbean. But he

continued to be a regular contributor to debates on urban regeneration and the future of the Thames Gateway.

In his last years Reg took life little easier at his home near his daughter at Broadwell Manor. In April 2004 Reg and his wife Betty celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary with a lunchtime party at Stow-in-the-Wold attended by many of the LDDC's original staff. Betty died early in 2010. Reg leaves 2 children, John and Sarah.

· **Albert Joseph Reginald Ward, local government executive and urbanist, born 5 October 1927; died 6 January 2011**

## **CONTRIBUTIONS:**

### **Peter Rees, City of London planning officer**

'I understood Reg. My own mother, like Reg, was from Gloucestershire and the people there have a strategic tactic of getting to a point, where they don't appear to be heading, often by going in the wrong direction. It was a great skill.

'I worked against him many times. But it was a friendly rivalry.

'He was one of life's characters and was always up for an opportunity even if it meant changing direction.'

### **Owen Luder, former RIBA President**

'I was with Peter Walker, the then Environment Secretary, as part of a Government Mission to the Conference on Cities in Indianapolis in 1971. How to develop Docklands was a hot topic.

'As I grew up in the East End and knew it well I had several long discussions with him on how best to proceed. The development of Maplin as the third airport which would have triggered the development of Docklands had been scrapped in 1967. My advice to Walker was not to go along with a suggested joint local council development committee because, although they were all Labour Councils, they would still fight among themselves and nothing would happen. My view was that he should set up in effect a New Town Corporation as that would be the best way to raise finance and make things happen quickly.

'As a result, when I returned to the UK, I was invited to take the then civil servant boss of his department on a tour of Docklands. I would like to say my advice was followed. It wasn't. The political decision taken was to have a local council lead committee. Nothing much happened for ten years until Michael Heseltine set up the LDDC in 1981 and without doubt Reg Ward as the Chief Executive made things happen.