

## FEATURE

# Green shoots emerge from the dust of dereliction

*The Story behind Walled City Partnership's Townscape Heritage Initiative*

By MARY KERRIGAN  
Education Officer  
Walled City Partnership

**H**undreds of bombs exploded in Derry during the Troubles. On top of tragic loss of life and injury, these tore the physical heart out of this special, historic city. It's remarkable more wasn't lost. The influence of local architects and Paddy Doherty's

Inner City Trust saved numerous bomb-damaged buildings in Magazine Street, Pump Street and London Street. Several empty, listed shirt factories were given new life and bright futures under the wise leadership of North West Development Officer, Jim Foster. But, long after the bombings stopped, lots of old buildings bit the dust – unnecessarily. Why?

In the late 1980s, 1990s, and 'noughties', love for these,

and appreciation of their great potential for regeneration and tourism, was in short supply among key decision-makers, developers, and a wider community weighed down by the impact of serious protracted conflict and economic malaise.

Other side effects of the conflict contributed. Removal of council powers to a centralised civil service unaccountable to the local electorate; resulting fragmented

governance structures; weak planning controls; Derry's chronically weak economy and a slow-bedding 1990s peace process, shaped the emerging culture of development.

'Progress' was new build – listed buildings nothing more than a potential 'site'. Senior civil servants spoke of the need to 'balance heritage against progress'.

In the drive to jump-start Derry's flagging economy, whole streets, and parts of streets, disappeared within and without the unique walled city. Efforts to create shopping facilities on a par with other cities led to the demolition of numerous old buildings for developments like 'Westside Stores' (Tesco), Foyle'side Shopping Centre, the City Hotel, and even worse – nothing at all. Not much balance there. The quality of replacements was no match for the cultural and architectural riches of the predecessors.

Cultural disinterest in old buildings and spaces revealed itself in spectacular losses. Despite valiant lobbying by a few, the B+ listed 'Tillie and Henderson' shirt factory – the largest in the British Isles when built – was demolished in January 2003. Its

fate was sealed by protracted inaction by statutory government agencies tasked with its protection, 38 arson attacks, and the predominant

collective lack of interest in the wider community.

As Tillie's bit the dust, few realised a counter movement was sprouting green shoots.



Left, April 1982... The junction of Castle Street and Shipquay Street photographed in the wake of a bomb blast [07-06-13 SML 2]. Right, the same spot today is evidence of the heritage project's success [07-06-13 SML 7].



REBORN... The former Northern Counties Hotel building at Waterloo Place

