

Epsom Civic Society

shaping the future, safeguarding the past

NEWSLETTER No -136- SUMMER 2013

CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTARY

FIRST PAST THE POST>>>>WHY STROWGER CAME TO EPSOM

I remember that when our daughter was born in 1959 not all of our relatives were on the phone and we sent telegrams to some - 'Mother and daughter both well'. With so many mobiles, remotes, Blackberries and Androids about these days it is remarkable that last year 2012 was the centenary of the first automatic telephone exchange in Britain and this was at 36, Upper High Street, Epsom (below). It took a long time before every house in the country was connected and now many presumably rely entirely on the 'mobile'.

The system known as 'Strowger', after its American inventor, enabled 350 subscribers to pick up their telephone and dial their friends on 18th May 1912 via the UK's first automatic telephone exchange. For some it spelled an end to the days of waiting for an operator to say 'number please'. By dialling just three digits they could be connected to a phone of their choice. Many young people would be confused today if presented with a dial phone.



Epsom was chosen for this historic telecoms milestone because, it seems, it was a particularly friendly community where people mainly called each other rather than further afield which would have needed the help of an operator. The estimate for the purchase and installation of the equipment was £5,471 5s 4d. and the further deployment of the system was a massive investment programme in the 1920s followed by System X digital exchanges in the 1980s and 90s and currently the deployment of Broadband.

The Daily Mirror called the Epsom subscribers and reported their delight at the universal speed and privacy of the new system. Sadly the exchange closed in 1932 when, because of the increase in numbers, it reverted to a manual system and subscribers had to wait until 1965 for the return of the dial and automatic working.

The Strowger system was invented by an undertaker because, apparently, his rival's wife was the local operator and she was directing enquiries to her husband's company.

Many thanks to a member, Ann Ali, for sending me an article written by BT Heritage curator Dave Shawyer and I acknowledge this as the source of these photographs

Maureen and I were invited to the Old Cottage Hospital on Saturday 8th June to witness the planting of a tree - a maple - in memory of Emily Davison who died in the hospital on 8th June 1913 after her fall at the Derby. The Mayor and a number of other dignitaries were there and thanks to Mike Ford -Mr Trees - for a great event. The tree is in the front garden so have a look if you are visiting or passing.

Harry Corben

PLANNING APPLICATIONS

Land off Mill Road: We had recommended that the application for the revised housing development should be refused. It came before the April Planning Committee and was duly refused, in face of an officers' recommendation to approve. Refusal was on the grounds that (1) the proposed development would result in the loss of wildlife and biodiversity habitat, and would lead to the potential loss of significant habitat of a nationally protected mammal and other species and (2) it would constitute overdevelopment leading to the loss of openness and a locally important green open space, harming the local open character. No doubt a further reduced proposal will come forward in due course.

Organ and Dragon Inn, London Road, Ewell: The new application to change the use to a KFC restaurant and takeaway was refused by the March Committee and the Appeal into the first refusal was surprisingly the subject of a Public Inquiry scheduled to be heard in May over three days. I was not able to attend but the issue was solely one of traffic and highways safety and was a test of the Borough's refusal based on local objections supported by professional advice, against an application and the County Highways' decision not to object. No doubt both refusals were dealt with and the decision is awaited with interest.



97 East Street: The proposal to build 45 units of supported accommodation for young people between the ages of 16-25 was debated at the March Planning Committee with a recommendation to permit. The issues included (1) the local feeling of possible disturbance – the Committee was told that occupants would be nominated by the Council and the general feeling of members was to support the use; (2) the design which was very modern and included very brightly coloured panels – this caused alarm but Anthony Evans (Conservation and Design Officer) thought the unashamedly contemporary design was entirely appropriate for East Street; the drawing displayed was rather lacking in colour and the officers were authorised to negotiate the actual materials to be used; (3) the serious general point in East Street of the change of use of buildings designated for employment use when there was no current demand for offices - a motion to refuse was made on this issue but was lost and permission given on a vote of 7:4.

Comrades Club, The Parade: The Appeal against the last refusal of permission for hotel redevelopment was dismissed, but only on technical grounds about signing the agreement for infrastructure costs. The Inspector found the revised scheme addressed satisfactorily the concerns of the previous Inspector. It follows that any fresh application with the same design would almost certainly be approved. There does, however, seem to be some doubt about the hotel company's wish to pursue this idea. The whole situation is therefore uncertain.



Lintons Lane Centre: A planning application has now been made for 85 units divided into 38 houses and 47 flats. The layout and design had already been through several versions when we saw the consultation, and has now been further adjusted to reflect the views of planning officers and of the public at the exhibition – plus our own. We will be considering the road layout, the designs, the building heights, the density, and parking and traffic among other things and will be sending our comments which are likely to be critical of a number of aspects.

The Old Court House, Ashley Road:

This building, formerly the Magistrates Court, is now pretty well completed. You will remember that the ground and first floors were designated for a doctors' surgery or, failing that, offices. We understand that NHS Surrey had refused to provide funding for the surgery, and the developer has also failed to get any interest in the offices. An application has therefore been made to provide eight additional flats in this space. We see no objection to housing use as such instead of offices, but we have suggested that further time should be allowed for the doctors to pursue their funding application with the new NHS Surrey Downs Commissioning Group which took over these functions in April. We await the result.



Warehouse rear of 9-25, Manor Green Road. Permission was granted last year for this warehouse, behind the shops in Manor Green Road, to be used as a car wash. In view of local objections the permission was limited to one year which is about to expire. An application was made to remove the restriction and allow the use permanently. We wrote to oppose this. Local people still find this use in a residential area undesirable; we and others complained about blatant advertising – which has since been removed; and it was clear the site was being used to sell second hand cars. The application was refused by the May Committee on the grounds that the development was adversely affecting the amenities of neighbouring residential properties. The selling of cars was a separate issue and with the refusal of permission the whole use will now have to cease.

Alan Baker

CONSERVATION

Since the AGM we have already looked at nineteen applications affecting Conservation Areas or listed buildings. One application was for a garage for a small Victorian semi-detached house in a conservation area, which seems innocent enough except that it followed on from a previous application for a very large extension. This had been refused but a more modest proposal was subsequently approved. The garage seems to take us back to the first application and we wrote suggesting that this further proposal was a step too far, and perhaps a Trojan horse – the garage could in future be converted to habitable use.

An application was submitted a few months ago for a backland development in Manor Green Road in the Stamford Green Conservation Area. The application was refused and this was upheld following an appeal. A new application has been submitted for the site for a modern house of very appealing design but which suffers the same difficulties relating to the impact on the character of the conservation area. We wrote expressing this view but not without some sympathy with the aspirations of the applicant and the quality of the proposed building.

A more worrying application was submitted very recently. This was to demolish 25 Alexandra Road and replace it with a block of flats. This house is locally listed, being described by the Borough as “*one of the few surviving late Victorian Houses on Alexandra Road, with many of its internal and external features intact. In particular the stained glass windows and front door, with plaster mouldings, fireplace, timber details, staircase internally.*” A very brief letter has been sent about this – I feel some surprise that, knowing the heritage importance of this house, the applicant should nonetheless feel that there are sufficiently strong reasons to support an application to demolish it.



At the AGM I asked for volunteers to form a panel to which I can refer applications when I feel the Society should lodge an objection. Having a broader base of opinion adds weight to our submissions. I had a few volunteers who have already been very helpful in providing their views. So far I am happy to report that we have all been in agreement! I would like one or two more people on the panel, so if you feel you would like to help please let us know.

Robert Austen

DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT POLICIES

This important Development Plan Document (DPD) has recently been published by our Borough Council as a Pre-Submission draft for consultation. This DPD, when finally approved will provide the basis for adjudicating on planning applications as it sets out the council's policies for the future. As you would expect, it is a very wide-ranging document and includes such policies as those on the Green Belt, biodiversity, heritage, design and housing provision. This is the culmination of the process in producing this document and the planning group of your committee has previously contributed many constructive comments. On this occasion we spent several hours perusing it and, apart from several minor comments, complimented the council on how well it read. Over the coming months and years it will be referred to many times by the relevant members of your committee.

Malcolm Boyd

THE KING'S ARMS PUB



This attractive pub in East Street with ample parking and a large rear garden is now in the hands of administrators. Are we to see yet another development of apartments, or could another enterprising publican take it over. As always it is a case of 'wait and see'.

Malcolm Boyd

MEMBERSHIP

Our current membership is over 1900 which, for a Society like ours, is excellent and a record membership for us. There are 59 members who do their part in delivering Newsletters and collecting Subscriptions. As you would expect, a few are unable to do every delivery due to holidays, operations etc. Therefore I am hoping that some of you might be prepared to do an occasional delivery and/or assist in distributing envelopes of Newsletters to the Road Reps - a helpful [to me!] way of perhaps seeing a bit of Epsom you don't know so well. If you could do this please contact me.

Annual Subscriptions

Thank you to those members who have paid their Subs. and especially to those who have generously given donations. A reminder for those who have not yet paid - subscriptions are due - £2 per individual, £3 per household. If you have not yet paid and you were out when he/she called, your Road Rep. should have put a note on this Newsletter giving a reminder of his/her address. Please save them an extra trip by taking your Subscription to them. If unsure whether you have paid or not please contact your Road Rep or me.

Congratulations

And finally, I would like to tell you about Frank Hiscock, our record-breaking Road Rep who has been doing his bit for the Society for 23 years and, at the age of 94, has decided that he should call it a day. The Society marked the occasion by presenting him with a small gift at our 'Thank you to Road Reps' Social last month.

. Ishbel Kenward - Membership Secretary (728570)

HERITAGE OPEN DAYS - 14th/15th September

All over England on this weekend [apart from London which has Open House the following weekend] buildings will be open to the public which are not normally open. The Society will be involved with buildings in Church Street. St. Martins Church and Bell Tower will be open on Sunday 15th September 2 – 5 p.m. Refreshments will be available and there may also be the chance to 'have a go' at bell ringing. We don't currently have the details of which other buildings in the town will be open though the Durdans Riding Stables and purpose built Riding School in Chalk Lane will be open. Nearer the time details will be on our Website and will also be found on <http://www.heritageopendays.org.uk/>

FACEBOOK

We have recently opened a page for the Society on Facebook with the help of one of our members in an attempt to reach a larger, probably younger, part of the community. Please tell your families about this new venture and encourage them to open it and 'become friends'. It will only be by people using it that it will become fully effective.

The website is www.facebook.com/epsomcivicsociety

Malcolm Boyd

EVENTS AND OUTINGS

Bletchley Park - Thursday 11th April

We had 57 members (a coach load and one car) on the outing to Bletchley Park (Station X) in April and, despite having a waiting list of 16 people, everyone who wished to go was able to do so. (Therefore, never despair; you will probably get on any outing nearer the date of departure.) We began our visit in the original Mansion where my aunt, Beryl Dean, of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force, was one of the first ten people to work there. That morning there were numerous coach parties but luckily we were assigned the ballroom for our coffee, before visiting Hut 12 for our introductory talk. Two guides, John and Keith, then separately escorted us round part of the site before we returned for lunch. In the afternoon we were able to visit the various huts and the Colossus Gallery, all housing different aspects of the Bletchley Park secret work, and see the recently established museum, particularly covering the work of Sir Alan Turing. The shop, which is well laid out, has a fascinating collection of books.

There are ongoing plans to restore other huts - 3, 6, and 11a will be re-developed for interpretation of the reconstructed Bombe machine and its relationship to Enigma, scheduled for the site's re-launch in 2014. If you have not visited the Park, I urge you to do so.

Sheila Wadsworth

IAN WEST WALKABOUT – A REMINDER

The walk will take place on Sunday 30th June 2013 in an area around West Hill Avenue. We will meet by the arch in Meadway just off the roundabout in West Hill Avenue at 2.30. The walk will not be too long with the speciality being an 'arts and crafts' house.

Any enquiries to **Peter Follett** on 0208 393 7789

BUFFET SUPPER PARTY - Friday 11th October

Do apply now for your ECS Buffet Supper tickets. It is always a very friendly, relaxed evening and the committee is delighted to meet members, longstanding and recent, in a large modern room. Arrive for 7.30 p.m. and enjoy a welcoming glass of wine, or soft drink, and then you are served with a varied buffet at your table by Studio Food and later be entertained by Kate Bown and The Melody Makers. The cost will be £19. The application form is on the last page of the Newsletter.

THE WALLACE COLLECTION- Thursday 28th November - our pre-Christmas Event



This is a London gem. Whether you have never visited, or go regularly, the Wallace Collection is a "must". It is housed in a specially-built town house, Hertford House, in Manchester Square and is a collection principally acquired in the 19th century by the 3rd and 4th Marquesses of Hertford and Sir Richard Wallace. His widow bequeathed the collection to the nation in 1897 with the proviso that it remains "unmixed with other objects of art" so nothing may be loaned or added. It enshrines an Anglo-French taste and contains one of the finest examples of 18th century pictures, porcelain and furniture outside Paris, plus 17th century paintings and an exceptional armoury and numerous curios. They also have a free, additional

exhibition of male nudes painted at the French Academy.

We arrive there about 11 a.m. for coffee/tea and then have two guided tours at 11.30 a.m. lasting about one and a quarter hours - maximum 50 people. At 1.00 p.m. there is lunch in the restaurant (starter and main course, plus coffee/tea) and then members can wander around the 29 galleries, or walk for some 5 minutes to Oxford Street or Baker Street for a little Christmas browsing or shopping. We depart from outside Hertford House at 4.15 p.m. for our scenic journey back to Epsom seeing the Christmas lights in the shopping streets and by the River Thames.

The cost will be £47 per person to cover Hardings coach and tip, restaurant and tip, and guide. Departure times are (A) 9.00 a.m. The Street, Ashted; (B) 9.15 a.m. Epsom Downs, Tattenham Corner behind the tea hut; or (C) 9.25 a.m. Methodist Church, Epsom.

APPLICATION FOR THE BUFFET SUPPER - FRIDAY 11th October 2013

MEMBER/S NAME/S

and FRIENDS

ADDRESS

TEL. NO:

No. of TICKETS

TOTAL COST £

Kindly indicate if you have any particular dietary requirements or need/have a wheelchair

YES/NO

THE W ALLACE COLLECTION - THURSDAY 28th November 2013 - 50 SEATS

MEMBER/S NAME/S:

We can only take friends if seats are available after the end of OCTOBER

ADDRESS

TEL. NO:

NO. of TICKETS

TOTAL COST £

Please circle where you wish to be collected: A B C

Kindly indicate if you have any particular dietary requirements or need/have a wheelchair

YES/NO