

# Golden Jubilee Edition

## 1959 - 2009

*To protect the interests of the residents of Epsom by endeavouring to maintain the town's traditional character.*

*To foster public and official interest in the preservation of such fine buildings, trees and open spaces as remain in the town.*

*To ensure that when new development takes place it shall form a worthy addition to the neighbourhood in which it is sited.*

*To encourage the fuller use of Planning Powers in order to achieve these ends.*

*The Society shall have no political or religious activities and shall be non-profit making.*

### CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTARY

#### FIFTY YEARS ON

Some 155 members and a few guests assembled for our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Dinner at the RAC Woodcote Park on the 7<sup>th</sup> July. We drank a toast to the Society and remembered the group of residents who at the first meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1959 demonstrated their sense of civic responsibility by adopting the series of aims shown above.

The Epsom and Ewell Advertiser of the 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1959 reported the meeting with the heading 'New Society will fight against subtopia'. 71 people had already joined the Society and at a crowded meeting at a private house on The Parade, Geoffrey Aronson, the first Chairman suggested that 'our council are not making sufficient use of their planning powers'. Mr Nott, a member of the Town Planning Committee at that time was glad to see so much interest being taken in planning matters although he did not believe that the council's record was as black as had been made out.

The name and the aims of the Society have not changed. The subscription has risen from 12½ pence to £3 for a household and we now have more than 1700 members. When he proposed the toast at our dinner Geoffrey Stone, previous Chairman, repeated our strap line 'Shaping the future, safeguarding the past', thanked members for their support and promised that the Society will remain proactive and will tackle the issues which, inevitably, will arise in the years ahead.

Our thanks especially to Norman Dempster and Joy Furness for organising the Dinner, Geoffrey Stone, Malcolm Boyd and Tom Dethridge for preparing the Anniversary documents, our treasurer Tony Smith and all the experts on the committee who have contributed so much during a busy year.

We hope to see many of you at our 'Buffet Supper' on the 9<sup>th</sup> October.

**Harry Corben, Chairman**

## ANNIVERSARY EXCURSION TO CHANTILLY

The first celebration of our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, a visit to Epsom's Twin Town, took place when forty eight members assembled at 7.15 am on Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> May and travelled via the Tunnel to Chantilly. We arrived at our hotel Chateau de Montvillargene at about 4pm and were delighted at what we found. The Chateau, about two miles outside Chantilly, was built for the Rothschild family just before WW1 and was occupied by the Germans during WW2. After the war it was occupied by the Sacred Heart's holy order and then in 1985 became a hotel and achieved its 4<sup>th</sup> star in 2003. Chantilly is in the middle of an ancient forest in which wild boar are said to roam and the hotel is surrounded by trees. After we settled in we enjoyed a splendid dinner and early next morning we set out to see Chantilly.



We have arrived



Chairman and others



Chateau de Chantilly

(photos by Margot Baker and Geoffrey Stone)

The Chateau de Chantilly was well worth the visit especially in the beautiful sunshine. In the afternoon, after lunch in a typical French restaurant, we enjoyed The Musee Vivant du Cheval where we were entertained to an Equestrian Spectacular and visited the Equestrian Museum. Dinner in a Chantilly restaurant followed and we were pleased to get to bed after a great second day. Chantilly has been awarded the status of Ville d'art et d'histoire and on Friday we were conducted through the canals and the Pavilion which were constructed in 1679 to supply water to the Chateau. Sarah Gillois who is responsible for ensuring the maintenance of the old architecture and the town's heritage expertly explained things to us interpreted, when necessary, by Mme Claudine Thieffine. In the afternoon we visited the Potager de Prince. These gardens were founded to provide food for the Chateau and are now a major attraction.

We thought we should investigate the planning rules as they affect Chantilly and realised that because of its status The French Ministry of Culture keeps a firm eye on any changes which are contemplated. The town authorities however have issued a leaflet which advises how shop fronts should conform to an agreed standard and even suggests the colours which are acceptable to planners.



On our way home at Compeigne

(Photo, Geoffrey Stone)

Early on Saturday morning we left our hotel for Compiègne where, in a railway carriage, the 1<sup>st</sup> World War armistice was signed. The 2<sup>nd</sup> World War ended, as far as the French Nation was concerned, when in the same carriage its capitulation was signed on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1940. This carriage was then taken to Berlin and destroyed by fire towards the end of the war. An identical carriage was found and is now on display. It was a very impressive exhibition.

Then we returned to Calais for a visit to the vast shopping centre where we encountered our first French rain and then later back to a beautiful sunny English evening. Grateful thanks and congratulations to Norman Dempster and Joy Furness for their preparation and organisation of the trip, to Michel Dambrin from Chantilly who assisted him and to Tony Smith our Treasurer who dealt with the hotel and travel arrangements thus enabling us to have a wonderful visit.

**Harry Corben**

## **EPS WINS GOLD**

At the Golden Jubilee Celebration Dinner in the RAC Club on 7th July the invited guests mingled with 150 members of the Society. The guests included the Mayor, Councillor Mrs Jan Mason and her consort Alan Mason, Chris Grayling our local MP and his wife Sue, David Smith, Chief Executive of the Borough and his wife Jenny and Brian Fender who was on the founding committee of EPS. We also welcomed Ian Purser and his wife Candida. Ian is a Director of Atkins who generously supported the dinner, as they did for our 40th anniversary.

Warmly welcoming members and guests, Chairman Harry Corben paid tribute to the founders and subsequent officers of the Society with particular reference to Brian Fender our first Honorary Secretary and surviving member who drafted the original statement of aims, reproduced on the back of the dinner menu and again on Page 1 of this newsletter, which are still relevant in 2009. Our Honorary Secretary, Malcolm Boyd then said grace.

After the dinner and before proposing the toast to the Society, Past Chairman Geoffrey Stone spelled out the Society's attitudes and objectives and the way ahead. EPS was a proactive civic society and the present level of membership of over 1700 was a major source of strength. Members were warmly thanked for giving their continuing support.

Following the toast he introduced Brian Fender our founder Secretary. Brian recalled the initial meeting at the home of Herbert Nicholson in the Parade into which squeezed 70 citizens concerned about the future of Epsom on the 29th March 1959. He went on to tell us about episodes from the early days and deplored the illegal destruction of the old Pitt Place by developers as well as the demolition of houses in The Parade for the Town Hall extension.

Responding, on behalf of the guests, the Mayor complimented the Society on its achievements stressing the high regard it had built up for its views and recommendations put forward over the years. She wished the Society well for the future.

Our Chairman then introduced Peter Groves who entertained us with an action packed presentation on the history and traditions over five centuries of the Honourable Artillery Company. Dressed in the full uniform of the Company of Pikemen and Musketeers his demonstration of loading and firing of the musket with commands had a touch of humour and yet was deadly serious.

Concluding, the Chairman thanked Moya and Norman Dempster for organising the Dinner and providing the table flowers and thus a memorable evening came to an end - the Society had marked its Golden Jubilee with a long to be remembered event.

**Tom Dethridge, Former Honorary Secretary and Chairman**

## **THE SOCIETY'S INAUGURATION 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1959**

Fifty years ago half a dozen couples from Epsom went to a dance at the Burford Bridge Hotel. During the course of the evening they fell to talking about the damage being done to our town by new developments. We came to the conclusion that we needed a society that could lobby the Borough Council when necessary and persuade them to exercise town planning control more effectively. An ad hoc Committee was formed, consisting of Geoffrey Aronson, Chairman, (legal adviser at Min of Ag and Fish), Bob Walker as Vice-Chairman (Surveyor to City of London Corporation), Herbert Nicholson, or Nick, as Treasurer-cum-Membership Secretary (Quantity Surveyor) and Brian Fender, as Secretary (Architect). We knocked together a leaflet and circulated it amongst our friends and neighbours, inviting them to attend a meeting in Nick's house at 7 The Parade. This was where the ugly extension to the Town Hall now stands.

We expected about a couple of dozen responses. Seventy people turned up, with 25 in the Drawing Room, another 25 in the Dining Room; we left the doors open to the bottom of the staircase and used it as our rostrum. There were 20 more along the passage and up the staircase. Nick summed his aims succinctly: "I have sometimes been accused of being a bit of a hothead. I hope I shall be enrolling a lot more hotheads into this society before long" and he did. That is how the Society began. As the dogsbody scribe I set out the aims more formally as they appear on Page 1 of this Newsletter.

The Committee met regularly and reviewed applications that merited comment. My task was to put the Committee's view into words. We were initially regarded by some of the Councillors as a bit of a nuisance, but it was always our aim to make responsible comment. Little by little this seemed to be recognised and I am glad to know that the Society still has that reputation. Refusal notices were often appealed. Developers frequently appointed Counsel or Queen's Counsel to put their case, but the Borough Council had to make do with their Deputy Town Clerk. I do not say this as a criticism of Douglas Grimes. It is true that he was not a barrister, but he stood his corner very ably and when I could take time out I tried to come along as well to put the Society's view. I shall relate one tale that you may find amusing:

This concerned Pitt Place which had been acquired by someone who was working in Japan but planned to come home and set up house there. He had instructed his architect to make any necessary investigations to enable him to plan the necessary restoration work. He had also installed a caretaker. Unfortunately the owner died not long afterwards and his executors sold up. The developers who bought it made it a condition of their offer that the caretaker be removed before they took over. They evidently did not want care to be taken. They sought planning permission to demolish. They were refused, but appealed. I suggested to Douglas Grimes that he call the former caretaker as a witness to its condition and he did so. At the Inquiry the Developer's Counsel called an architect who described what he considered to be defective; but defects can be repaired, so Counsel asked him to produce a sample of 'the dry rot that he had found in the cellar', for dry rot, when it gets under way, can be pretty devastating. His so-called 'expert' opened his briefcase and produced a piece of rotten wood. The Inspector looked at it and said, mildly: "Very interesting Mr So-and-so, but I hope you realise that's not dry rot!" Later Douglas Grimes called Mr Carr the former caretaker to ask whether he had been into the cellar, and was told that he often had to go down to chase the kids out, for it was dirty and they could hurt themselves; asked if he had seen evidence of dry rot down there, he replied; "No, there definitely wasn't any dry rot down there!" In cross-examination counsel for the developers pounced: "You're a bus driver aren't you?" Mr Carr confirmed this. "So what makes you, a bus driver, think that you know what dry rot looks like?" The reply was lovely: I bleedin' well ought to know. I worked for Rentokil for eighteen years". Game, set and match, it would seem.

They lost the appeal, but sadly they won in the end. Returning one Sunday night from a week-end away we could see a pile of rubble where the house had been. I went to see the demolition contractor on Monday morning. He agreed that it was a shame but if he hadn't taken the job on they would have found someone else. His instructions were precise: "Start at five o'clock on Friday evening and have it all down by nine o'clock on Monday morning". (Councils aren't geared up to apply for injunctions at week-ends and injunctions aren't much use after the building is down.)

**Brian Fender, Foundation Honorary Secretary**

## **An Enduring Symbol**

As reported in the Summer Newsletter your Society presented a fountain to the Borough to mark our Golden Jubilee and this was opened in Rosebery Park by the then Acting Chief Executive Frances Rutter. Those of you who have ventured into Rosebery Park will have seen that the fountain has been out of action and the Society has been making strenuous efforts to determine the problem and to bring it back to full working order, not helped by the fact that there is currently no power supply in the park due to a recent traffic accident. We expect the fountain to be operating again very soon.

**Editor**

## **PLANNING APPLICATIONS**

A number of results and a major new outline scheme which we find commendable.

**15, Eastway:** This proposal to demolish a two storey house close to the Ebbisham Sports Ground and replace it with two three-storey blocks of student accommodation was refused and appealed. The Inspector has dismissed the Appeal on the grounds that the proposal would cause harm to the character of the area and to the living conditions of the adjoining house.

**Wilberforce Court, Heathcote Road:** This much better sited proposal for student accommodation next to the Art School was approved by the June Planning Committee subject to conditions.

**Trevi, 33, Heathcote Road:** This small 4-bedroom 1960s house is on the opposite side of the Art School vehicle entrance from Wilberforce Court. In a quite separate application it was proposed to demolish the house and build a three storey block of six flats. We objected because we thought it too high and bulky to fit into the street scene. It was refused but the reasons were mainly related to the width of the vehicle crossing from Heathcote Road.

**Drummond Gardens, Christchurch Mount:** The latest application for 3-storey flats, to which we objected, has been appealed because a notice of decision was not given by the Council within the prescribed eight week period. The decision will now be made by the Inspectorate.

**The Comrades Club, The Parade:** I described last time in some detail this proposal to demolish the Club next to the Town Hall and build a Travelodge hotel with 85 bedrooms and no parking. This went to the July Committee with a recommendation to permit, but was summarily thrown out after some very pithy comments from a number of members. The reasons for refusal included overdevelopment, traffic, size, height and massing.

**Rear of 39-41, Manor Green Road:** The latest application for this small site fronting Hamilton Close was for a pair of 4-bedroom semi detached houses, the earlier scheme for three town houses having been refused last year. The new scheme has also been refused, the grounds including its unduly dominant and incongruous appearance, its overbearing effect on adjoining dwellings and lack of amenity space.

**Hylands Mews:** The Inspectorate has dismissed an appeal against the refusal of permission for a 2-bedroom 2-storey house on the land in Hylands Mews, at the rear of 67-69 Dorking Road. This was the latest of several proposals, all refused on appeal.

**Sainsburys, Kiln Lane:** The arrangements for alterations at Sainsburys have received planning permission, including the new entrance feature to which we objected. The officers' report said that the new arched entrance would not harm the appearance of the overall design of the store. I still disagree.

**Nescot, Reigate Road, Ewell:** For once it is pleasant to report a major outline application which we consider sensible and well thought out. Nescot find their accommodation, extended many times, to be unsatisfactory with the many scattered buildings difficult to manage. It is therefore proposed to demolish nearly all the existing buildings and undertake a complete redevelopment. The present buildings and their adjoining land are in the Green Belt and "very special circumstances" have to be demonstrated before permission can be given. They propose to swing the new buildings round to be parallel to the railway. This will involve building on some open Green Belt land, whilst releasing other land fronting the road and will on balance improve the open-ness of the site. The new buildings will be of contemporary design which in this case we quite liked. We therefore supported the proposal which received outline permission at the July Planning Committee. It will now all depend on finance.

**Upper High Street development site:** On a more controversial note, the renewal by Tesco of the Peel permission was duly refused at the last Planning Committee. Tesco themselves have held a public exhibition of the scheme they hope to submit for planning permission in September. Their development team came to a special meeting with our Committee, outlined their scheme and answered questions. It is basically a retail development of about the same size as the Helical Bar scheme which was roundly refused at the end of 2006. There would be small units on the Upper High Street frontage and residential over this part, the main superstore being behind. We shall be giving this close attention and commenting suitably on the application when it is made.

**Alan Baker**

## **CONSERVATION**

The year has continued relatively quietly as far as conservation issues are concerned. Mostly, the 43 applications inspected have been related to buildings within conservation areas, with only five listed buildings affected (letters have been written about seven applications). As a matter of interest there are 404 nationally listed buildings and 84 locally listed buildings in the Borough. The locally listed buildings were formerly Grade III. Most of the nationally listed buildings are

Grade II with only 17 Grade II\* and no Grade I. Although they are all described as ‘Buildings’, it is perhaps something of a misnomer as there are plenty of walls (for example, the garden wall to Swail House), gates (such as those to the Durdans) and no less than 15 Coal Tax Posts.

Much greater concern has been caused by the poor quality and design of recent applications relating to shop signs. This leads to some interesting thoughts about the direction in which the town centre should develop. Some time ago, the Council commissioned a study into the demand for shopping in Epsom. This concluded that there was about the right amount of shopping space in the town centre and that the attempt should not be made to compete with the likes of Sutton, Croydon, Guildford or Kingston. The study recommended that Epsom should seek to establish itself as a niche shopping location. Examples of this type of town centre are Dorking, Farnham and East Grinstead. In these places, the variety and quality of the shops, often locally owned as well as a having a reasonable mix of the nationals, draws people to them. An essential part of this approach is that the town should be an attractive place, providing pleasure to the visitor.

At present, the town centre has a disproportionate number of low cost and charity shops. Although the High Street has much to recommend it most of it is a conservation area and it has many listed buildings, its visual quality and attractiveness are being slowly eroded. The Council has started to develop plans for the future of the town centre. It is expected that these will include the development of design standards which, rigorously enforced, which will reverse this trend and move Epsom towards the sort of shopping centre it should be and which will help to ensure that it has a thriving future.

**Rob Austen**

## **EPSOM & EWELL BOROUGH COUNCIL CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

We would like to take the opportunity to welcome Frances Rutter who has recently been appointed as Chief Executive of the Epsom & Ewell Borough Council. We wish her a long and successful time at the helm. We would also like to record our deep appreciation of the outgoing Chief Executive David Smith, with whom we have always experienced a close working relationship and wish him a complete recovery.

**Malcolm Boyd**

## **MEMBERSHIP**

Thank you to our members who have paid their Subs. and especially to those who have generously given donations. We now have over 1700 members, which is excellent, but the more members we have the more attention is paid to our opinions in planning matters. So, if you think you can recruit family, friends, neighbours or colleagues, please contact me for some of our leaflets which give information about the Society and include an application form.

**Ishbel Kenward (728570)**

## **DISPLAY**

The Society will be represented at the Autumn Fair in Horton Country Park on Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> September with a display illustrating the changes in Epsom during the last 50 years. We have also arranged to have a similar display in the Ashley Centre on Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> October. It would be good to see many of our members at both events.

**Malcolm Boyd**

## **LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK**

An important piece of the Local Development Framework is nearing completion. This is the Epsom Town Centre appraisal referred to earlier in Rob Austen’s article and your committee has been closely involved in responding to the Issues and Options paper produced by the Council and published for consultation. When all the comments have been considered and the preferred options identified the document will be sent to the Secretary of State for approval and will then form the basis for planning decisions for the next 15 to 20 years.

**Malcolm Boyd**

## NEWS MISCELLANY

- We understand that an appeal against the Council's decision not to allow conversion of the Lavandou stables complex into offices and dwellings is unlikely. The indoor riding school and associated stables together with all the adjacent paddocks and dwelling have been put up for sale at a figure of £600,000 by Savills on behalf of Halifax Estates. We believe that considerable interest has been shown in the property by prospective purchasers including several with equestrian interests. We await definite confirmation of the outcome with interest.
- It is well known that the Borough Council has to provide a large number of affordable dwellings and over the coming years some 750 new affordable homes will be built on the St Ebba's and West Park hospital sites including many already built in Pelham Way in Livingstone Park.
- A recent survey carried out by the borough council found that a very high proportion of residents rated Epsom a great place to live, citing public services, parks and open spaces. We have always considered pride in the community an important attribute and we welcome this result.
- English Heritage has recently drawn attention to a lack of adequate supervision and maintenance in certain conservation areas across the country. Epsom town centre is one of those areas highlighted and we, as the local civic society, must remain vigilant to unauthorised changes and poor maintenance.
- In our responses to the Issues and Options paper on the town centre mentioned above we often mention the importance of good building design. Richard Simmons, Chief Executive of CABA, (Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment) says 'We all use the built environment – buildings, streets, parks and public spaces – every day. Get design and management right and we make places to treasure. Get them wrong and we build in alienation and dysfunction'. **Editor**

## EVENTS OUTINGS and TALKS

**SUMMER OUTING** to The Friars at Aylesford and Ightham Mote on 27th August 2009.

At the time of writing this outing has not yet taken place. There was a good response and the coach is fully booked.

**IAN WEST WALKABOUT** Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> June 2009.

There was a good attendance. Ian took the group up South Street and talked about the various houses on the way to the hospital. Unfortunately I was unable to go because of back trouble but understand that everyone enjoyed the talk. Many thanks to Ian for giving up a Sunday afternoon once again.

**TALK** Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> November 2009 at 8pm in Myers Studio, Epsom Playhouse.

To complete the 50th Anniversary year celebrations Mark Berry has accepted our invitation to give this talk. It is over 3 years since Mark came and gave us his first impressions of Epsom shortly after coming to the Borough as Head of Planning. Since then there has been some significant development work in relation to planning the future of the town about which he would like to talk.

Not surprisingly he chose the title: - "EPSOM FUTURES"

The cost is £3 per ticket. Please apply on the form at the end of this newsletter.

**ANNUAL BUFFET SUPPER PARTY** Friday 9th October 2009, 7.45 to 10.15 pm.

As this year is the 50th Anniversary of the foundation of the EPS we plan to make the Supper Party a special event. It will be held as usual in the large hall of St Joseph's Church, St Margaret's Drive, Epsom (behind The Haywain in the Dorking Road). The evening starts with a glass of wine which you collect on arrival and, after you have chosen a seat, you do not need to get up again as, although the food is buffet style, it is served at your table. Our numbers have grown since the days when you had to collect your own food and so it is now brought to you at the table to save time and effort. An excellent meal will be provided by The Food Studio Caterers who looked after us last year. Afterwards there will be an entertainment lasting about an hour by Louisa Cordell and her husband Jamie. Louisa will play her harps (she brings more than one!) and talk about them and Jamie who has an excellent baritone voice will sing with her. Their music is varied and includes items from popular shows.

We do hope to have a good attendance and look forward to welcoming members who have not been before as well as those who come regularly. It is an informal and friendly occasion and you can bring guests who need not be EPS members because we are not restricted on numbers. The cost of each ticket is £17 (no increase since 2008). Please complete the application form at the end of the newsletter.

**Joy Furness**

APPLICATION FORM FOR TALK on Tuesday 17th November 2009  
to be held at 8pm in the Myers Studio, Epsom Playhouse

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

PHONE NUMBER.....

I would like.....tickets (£3 each) and enclose a separate cheque made payable to Epsom Protection Society for £.....and a separate stamped addressed envelope.

Please return to Joy Furness 37 Woodcote Hurst Epsom KT18 7DS (Tel 01372 722186)

APPLICATION FORM FOR BUFFET SUPPER PARTY

Friday 9th October 2009 at 7.45pm in St Joseph's Church Hall, St Margaret's Drive, Epsom

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

PHONE NUMBER.....

I would like.....tickets (£17 each) and enclose a separate cheque for £....made payable to Epsom Protection Society and a separate stamped addressed envelope (A6 size).

Please return to Joy Furness 37 Woodcote Hurst Epsom KT18 7DS (Tel 01372 722186)

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