

Epsom Civic Society

shaping the future, safeguarding the past

NEWSLETTER No -143- SPRING 2015

THE CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTARY

Epsom in Wartime

I have recently discovered 'Wartime in a Surrey Town'. It is undated but covers the period 1914-18 and shows the effect on Epsom as war takes over, to some extent, the lives of the people living here at that time. A great number of others assisted Trevor White and he uses, quite freely, the work of TOUCHSTONE the nom de plume of R.J.Hedge who chronicled for thirty years in the Advertiser the goings on in Epsom.

The three railway stations known as the Brighton, the South Western and the Downs gave good access to and from London. What was a backwater for most of the year came to life in June for The Derby and Edward VII was most offended one year when the train jerked on arrival and he was thrown back into his seat.

The town had no industry but eight hostelryes serving the main streets and eight churches on tributary roads. 'Lying in a natural basin the upper part possessing fine Downs and open to the sea on the south side.....we had water of superior quality in spite of 23 degrees of hardness from chalk held in solution'. 'After heavy rain the 'superior' water still floods to the bottom of the basin and fountains forth from leaking drains, hydrants and sewers'.

In 1913 the last remnants of the medieval Common Fields within Epsom were for sale but Epsom Urban District Council decided it could not afford £8,000. Lord Rosebery purchased Woodcote Place in South Street for his daughter along with the lands of Epsom Common Fields. (*We believe that South Street may have extended further south than its present length, Ed*) As proof of his 'deep and abiding affection for Epsom' he gave 12 acres of the land to be used as free and open space for ever. Hence Rosebery Park whose 'Friends' in 2014 arranged a memorial stone to celebrate the Centenary.



Westgate House in Chalk Lane, formerly Woodcote Place

There was some suspicion that Lord Rosebery was anxious to prevent the anticipated road which would have run close to Woodcote Place. The Park has lost one of its ponds, both of its bandstands and the wrought iron gates which graced the entrance from Ashley Road, but it is still very popular on a fine day and much used by commuters and shoppers every day. The Friends do hope to improve the Ashley Road entrance. The Fountain, provided by and maintained by the Epsom Civic Society, continues to give pleasure.



Rosebery Park

In 1913 negotiations began to hold a market in Epsom in line with King James II grant of 1685. The 'new' market started in November 1914 so with a new park and a new market the residents had things to occupy them as well as the war.

The visit by Lord Kitchener to his 20,000 troops on the Downs in 1915 was recorded in this way. 'Lord Kitchener's six minute appearance with the additions of human pyrotechnics and hospital patients throwing snowballs was ludicrous without being funny'.

The country's first postwomen started in Epsom and Miss Norah Willis of Horton Lodge is pictured in the book. Apparently she and Miss F. Hamilton Pott of Bentham, The Parade, were well known and of highly respected families who were giving their services absolutely voluntarily.

In my next article I will show how the Leatherhead Landladies and the Epsom Traders did gain some benefit from the start of hostilities; and the owner of Ewell Castle claimed damages for some articles in the National Press which claimed he was a German agent.

We wish all of our members a happy 2015 and hope to see many of you at the AGM and other events.

Harry Corben, Chairman

PLANNING APPLICATIONS

A number of permissions seem to be bringing the East Street saga towards a conclusion although you never can tell. I'll start with an update of the present position.

Crossways House and Bradford House, 39/39A East Street: The conversion to provide 97 student bedrooms, to which we had raised no serious objection, was considered at the November Planning Committee and planning permission was granted.



Rosebery House, 55 East Street: Following earlier refusals, a third application was made for the extension and conversion to residential use of these offices at the corner of Victoria Place. The number of flats would be reduced from 32 to 30, the ground floor would be offices instead of retail, the clutter of parking stacks would be omitted and more trees retained. We welcomed these improvements but objected to the continued provision of an additional floor and to an inadequate amount of parking. The January Planning Committee refused the application on these two grounds.



Haddad House, 81 East Street: You may remember that although the only reason for the dismissal of the appeal relating to the third attempt to develop this small site was the effect of the proposed development on the houses in Middle Close, the October Planning Committee also refused the fourth revised attempt. This has again been appealed but in the meantime a fifth effort has been submitted. We have said that we still find the proposals unattractive but the latest design has to be recognised as a further improvement



Acer House, 97-101 East Street: I told you last time about an application to demolish this building next to Wilsons showroom and build a three-storey block of flats and we objected to its size, inadequate parking, effect of the houses in Middle Lane and design. It went to the November Planning Committee with a recommendation to approve and permission was duly granted.



Wilson's Automobiles, 101B East Street: Last summer Wilsons applied to redevelop their unsightly car sales forecourt at the corner of Kiln Lane by building a two-storey showroom on the site. We objected that this would be unacceptable by reason of bulk, height, damage to the street scene, interference with sight lines and danger to the heavy traffic using this busy junction. That application was withdrawn but a new one was submitted in December with only minor amendments, and we again objected on the same grounds. We agreed with the company's comment that the present site is no advertisement for them, but could not agree that lack of viability of a smaller development was any justification for permitting the suggested excessive structure. We have now heard that planning permission has been granted subject to conditions, including a ban on displaying cars on the forecourt. This is at least a welcome restriction, but it is unfortunate that there was no way of securing a well-designed development on this corner in conjunction with the adjoining Acer House.



Priam Lodge, Burgh Heath Road: This a Green Belt case with some interesting points. Priam Lodge Stables are old historic racing stables in the Green Belt, but now occupied for commercial storage and parking and by a demolition contractor, which seem to be established uses. There is considerable local pressure for the restoration of stable use, but little demand. The owner therefore proposes the demolition of the existing buildings and the redevelopment of the site with four substantial dwellings in landscaped gardens. We objected to an earlier application in order to protect the Green Belt and it was refused on the main grounds of inappropriate development in the Green Belt, the dwellings not being in keeping with adjoining development, insufficient evidence of lack of demand for stables and no contribution to affordable housing. This refusal was appealed. Our Committee discussed a revised second application and we felt that the site was not now open land and that the proposed dwellings would be better than the present very unsatisfactory situation. It was therefore an exceptional case where Green Belt control could be relaxed and we withdrew our objection. I have now seen the Appeal decision dated 11th February, which supports this view. The Inspector dismissed the appeal but on the sole grounds of failure to comply with affordable housing requirements. I have also seen the planning department's decision dated 14th January to refuse the latest application on the same grounds as before. This a case where Green Belt grounds are very weak and the outcome now seems inevitable, although how this will happen is not clear; we only hope that conditions we have suggested will be included in any permission.

Berridale, 15 College Road: This is a large two-storey late-Victorian house opposite Lynwood Road, previously used by Rosebery Housing Association as a bed-sit but now vacant and impracticable to refurbish. Permission was granted on appeal some years ago for a replacement building of similar size and a two storey building in the rear garden. This was not implemented and a new application proposes a new three-storey block of nine one bedroom apartments, of similar style to the existing building, and a row of three two bedroom homes. This is very similar to the earlier design and, although larger than its neighbours, would not seem entirely out of place, and we had no major objection. It was approved by the January Planning Committee.

Ethel Bailey Close: I previously reported this proposal to build 48 new homes on the site of redundant NHS cottages. We had no serious reasons to object and this application also was approved by the January Planning Committee.

54 Rosebery Road, Langley Vale: This is a large bungalow making good use of a wide site near the corner of Harding Road. The applicant sees an advantage in making full use of the site and wishes to demolish the bungalow and build a pair of substantial two and a half storey semi detached

houses. We have objected to the nature, bulk, height and appearance of the proposals which would be an unacceptable imposition on the street scene.

The Combined Courts Site, Ashley Road: The ground floor and part of the first floor of the new building in Ashley Road has planning permission for a medical centre or, if that proves impracticable, offices. The centre is finding difficulty securing National Health funding and the developer, having failed to find an office tenant, applied for and was refused permission last year for residential use. An appeal was dismissed because the Inspector was satisfied that there remained a realistic prospect of the Ashley Centre surgery occupying the premises. Funds have still not been made available and a further application has been made for residential use. We understand that funding negotiations are actively taking place and we have said it is therefore still premature to permit a change of use. It is of course deplorable that National Health are delaying funds for so long.

Alan Baker

CONSERVATION

I have looked at a further 31 applications since the last newsletter but have written only two letters. One concerned the RAC Country Club and the second a listed house in South Street. South Street first: this was the second application and relates to a small Grade 2 listed semi-detached cottage. The application was referred to the panel and we all felt that the proposed extension was acceptable, such that, exceptionally, a letter of support should be written. The key passage is as follows: *The proposed extension is modest in scale and is set well back from the street facade and thus does not detract from the building's essential character. More importantly, however, the dwelling's facilities at present fall far short of those which most regard as fundamental to domestic life. Continued failure to provide adequate facilities may lead to the erosion of the market value of the property and a consequential gradual deterioration of the fabric of the building. The Society feels that the proposed extension, which we feel is in any event acceptable, is likely to prevent this from happening and thus help to preserve this important and historic asset of the town.* The issue of what is seen as necessary for ordinary domestic life today is very important and it can be seen as the motive behind many of the applications we see.



The RAC has submitted, I think, two sets of revised drawings. I'm not clear why this should have been necessary and, when this happens, applicants do not provide a description of the changes. While this is a large and complicated project, the scheme has been prepared by major consultants and one might have thought that all the issues would have been ironed out before submission. The repeated submissions tend to undermine one's confidence in the scheme. Personally, I think the RAC's commitment to the club is to be welcomed as long as it is not predicated on the 'enabling development' of the

two houses in the Green Belt which were the subject of a separate application. The RAC has owned the place for a century, and one would have imagined that the need for improvement and renovation would have been included in their financial planning for at least some of that period.

My concern about the RAC's plans concern the provision of parking. There are, I believe, no less than six separate car parks and the combined number of parking spaces exactly matches the peak of the demand curve. Apart from the difficulty of modelling demand with such precision, picture the last car to arrive at the peak moment, which must drive around the site looking for the single last bay somewhere in one of the six car parks. It is usual to allow some latitude in the predicted demand and then to over-provide by perhaps 5 or 10% to allow for the difficulty of locating a free parking bay.

You may recall some time ago we reported that we had written to oppose a development of three houses in Rosebery Avenue in the Burgh Heath Road Conservation Area. The application

was refused, but the applicant successfully appealed the decision. The Inspector found that the proposal ‘*would not result in a material loss of privacy, sunlight or outlook to houses in Burgh Heath Road.*’ He continued: ‘*I have had regard to other matters raised by neighbouring occupiers and Epsom Civic Society (my emphasis) including traffic and parking issues, drainage and potential noise and disturbance. However, having viewed the impact of the development from both Rosebery Avenue and Burgh Heath Road, and based on information before me, none of these matters individually or cumulatively would cause significant harm, and they are not, therefore, determinative.* Oh well, you can’t win them all; at least the matter was carefully considered by an impartial inspector and I believe we can, in the great majority of cases, place confidence in the impartiality and experience of the planning inspectorate.

Thinking of the South Street application, I nearly headed this piece ‘Where Can We Put the Boots?’ Some years ago we thought of moving to a flat some miles away, which sounded really delightful. A Victorian mansion, which once belonged to the Broadwood family, was being divided into flats and we duly went along to have a look. In the countryside and approached by an unmade drive perhaps a quarter of a mile long, the house was beautiful and had a magnificent hall with a huge glass roof-light picturing, of course, a piano. We entered the flat, the door opening almost directly into the living room, and at that point our interest evaporated: ‘where do we put the boots?’ There was not even place to hang coats. One of the problems of today’s tiny houses and apartments is frequently that the every-day needs of people are simply ignored, or perhaps forgotten. I like to think this is not an oversight by architects but is caused by the need to meet the financial demands of developers. But we all need those odd corners to put the things that matter to us, boots or books. This is perhaps why Victorian houses are still so popular, because they often have those unused corners which are so good for cupboards, bookshelves and all those things which allow us to change a house into a home.

Rob Austen

WOODLAND TRUST

Several of our committee joined a host of committed local residents and hopefully, Society members, to help plant some eight thousand trees on the chosen site between Langley Vale and Headley on Saturday 13th December. We were also joined by many members from the mosque in Morden who provided welcome refreshment. The Langley Vale primary school on the day before helped to boost the total of trees planted. The event was very well organized with an ample supply of young saplings, light-weight spades and protective translucent plastic tubes. We understand that it is planned to create a car park on Headley Road near the corner with Langley Vale Road and also to provide hard surface paths to the site. We are looking forward to the talk by Mr John Brown, the Regional Development Officer of The Woodland Trust, who will be our invited speaker at our

Annual General Meeting.



The Langley Vale Centenary Field and your editor doing his bit



A WINTER VISITOR

Those of you who have visited Rosebery Park over the last few months may have noticed a very colourful visitor. The mandarin duck has apparently taken up permanent residence in the pond and is even now pairing up with a female. Also, it is worth noting that the recently formed Friends of Rosebery Park, together with the Council, are helping to bring the park up to 'Fields in Trust' standard. Several of our members belong to the 'Friends' and are helping to fulfill one of the Society's objectives of enhancing pride in our town.



Malcolm Boyd

A BRIEF HISTORY of CIVIC SOCIETIES

We presume that most individuals like to maintain and preserve their locality/town so that it looks good and functions correctly. For those reasons voluntary associations have since the seventeenth century become important in the social and physical life of their locality. Increasing populations, industrialisation, demands for better housing and campaigns for parks and gardens all gave a focus to change. The author Anthony Wohl suggested that there was a tendency for churchmen to 'move away from a strict emphasis upon salvation and the after-life to a genuine awareness of the importance of physical environment'. British historian Asa Briggs famously described the middle decades of the nineteenth century as 'the age of improvement'.

These changes encouraged many individuals to press for enhancement of the environment and, in perhaps one of the most unlikely of settings, an Improvement Committee was formed in Sidmouth in Devon in 1846 to ensure 'the comfort and accommodation of visitors and for improvement generally'. This group became the 'Sid Vale Improvement' and continues to exist as the 'Sid Vale Association' and a member of the civic society movement today.

Gradually over the years voluntary bodies have sprung up to help to improve the urban landscape and to protect the parts of towns which are thought to be worth protecting while changing for the better those which perhaps need to be updated. Groups were set up to protect Hampstead Heath as early as 1829 and in the 18th Century John Kyrle 'the man of Ross' made improvements to his town, Ross-on-Wye in Rosshire, including a public garden for the use of residents.

During the inter war period many new civic societies were formed. Leeds and Birmingham were assisted by local political and professional figures including Neville Chamberlain, Sir Gilbert Barling and George Cadbury Jr. and they had wide interests in enhancing the quality of the urban environment through planning, preservation and design.

In Epsom a group of people met in a house in the Parade on the 23rd March 1959 and the Epsom and Ewell Advertiser reported the meeting with the heading 'New Society will fight against subtopia'. The subscription of 12 ½ pence has risen to £3 per household and the meeting of 71 people has now resulted in a membership of 1934. Originally called The Epsom Protection Society the name was changed, with some opposition, to The Epsom Civic Society and we are now founder members of 'Civic Voice' a national body which is headed by Griff Rhys Jones. Our motto remains 'shaping the future, safeguarding the past'.

I am indebted to 'A Brief History of the Civic Society Movement' for some of the detail in this article.

Harry Corben (Chairman)

OUTINGS

TUESDAY 14TH APRIL – PENSURST PLACE

Now we are post-Christmas and we have our new diaries may be you would like to join the outing to Penshurst Place and Gardens near Tonbridge, Kent, on Tuesday 14th April. There are still places available and your non-member friends will be most welcome. Cost is £35 and the application form is available in the last Newsletter, but you can contact me on 01372- 273517.

THURSDAY 30TH JULY - ROYAL HOLLOWAY COLLEGE AND RUNNYMEDE

The visit to the Royal Holloway College, University of London, is on Thursday 30th July. We have a guided tour of the Founder's chapel, north quad, Founder's Dining Hall (if available), south quad, Library and Victorian corridor followed by a lunch of sandwiches, fruit platter, tea/coffee/mineral water taken in the Picture Gallery. Sir Thomas Holloway assembled an amazing collection of paintings and we shall have a talk on them and free time to view them. At about 2.30 p.m. the coach will take us to the nearby Runnymede meadow where the 800 year celebrations of Magna Carta will have happened recently. Members will have the opportunity to visit the Memorial erected in 1957 by the American Bar Association, the Kennedy Memorial given by the Queen to the U.S.A. in 1965, or just enjoy the peace of the River Thames. Nearby there are also the Fairhaven Memorial Lodges designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens and housing a National Trust tearoom.

For the outing the coach will leave the car park behind the Tattenham Corner tea hut at 9.15 a.m (A), the Methodist Church, Epsom, at 9.25 a.m. (B) and The Street, Ashted at 9.35 a.m. (C). For the return journey we anticipate leaving Runnymede at 4.00 p.m. Cost of the visit is £28 per member. Non members will be welcome to book after 1st June or you can put their name/s on the waiting list until that date. For any enquiries my telephone number is 01372-273517. Application form is available at the end of this Newsletter.

Further date for your diaries

Friday, 16th October - The Buffet Supper. Details will be in the summer Newsletter.

Sheila Wadsworth

THE DOWNS

The Racecourse, Trainers and the Conservators face many challenges throughout the year with limited resources to meet them. I am pleased that five new Code of Conduct signs are now in place, and hope this will encourage all Downs users to respect each other. Many visitors still do not realise that racehorses have priority on the training gallops before 12 noon – they each pay £1000 annually for this right. If we ever lose the training of racehorses due to interference with training ability, it would be a very sad day indeed and the end of centuries of history. Cyclists and dog walkers seem to be particularly unaware of the danger of spooking a horse, whether of the hacking or racing variety.

A Joint Action group has been established to address the problems caused by out of control dogs. It has representatives from The Conservators, Racecourse, Trainers, Police and Borough Councillors – the problems occur in all the Borough Parks too - and the first meeting was considered very positive.

The sale of Downs House is taking much longer than hoped, so I am unable to report a satisfactory outcome yet. (18th February).

If the infestation of chafer grubs occurs again this year, it will be a headache for the Racecourse deciding how to treat it, as chemical control would be unacceptable. The turf is churned up by birds feeding on them and becomes unsuitable for racing.

Angela Clifford

SUBSCRIPTIONS

If you haven't paid the 2015 Subscription [Individual £2 / Household £3] to your Rep. yet please complete the slip at the bottom of the green AGM notice and take it to him/her. The list of Reps is on the 2nd page of the AGM notice and your Rep. will have marked their name. This would be much appreciated. If, for any reason, you are unsure who your Rep. is please phone me or email using the address on the end of this Newsletter.

Ishbel Kenward - Membership Secretary (728570)

APPLICATION FOR ROYAL HOLLOWAY COLLEGE - Thurs. 30th JULY

MEMBERS' NAMES.....

And FRIENDS (after 1st June)

ADDRESS.....

TEL. NO..... Mob. No. (for use on the day).....

COACH COLLECTION (please circle) (A) (B) (C)

NUMBER OF TICKETS..... TOTAL COST.....

Please return this form to Sheila Wadsworth, The Chestnuts, Farm Lane, Ashted, KT21 ILJ. Cheques to be made payable to "Epsom Civic Society" and enclose a **stamped addressed envelope**. Thank you.

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