

Epsom Civic Society

shaping the future, safeguarding the past

NEWSLETTER No -145- AUTUMN 2015

THE CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTARY

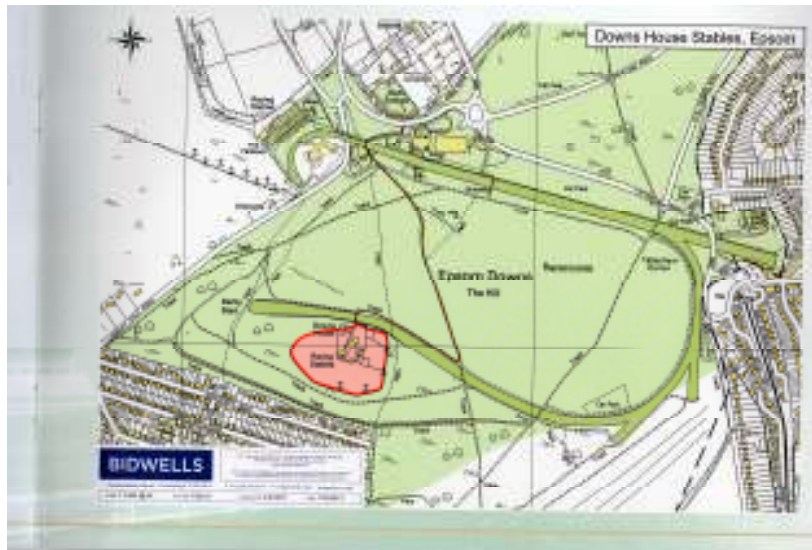
EPSOM and WALTON DOWNS

The Epsom and Walton Downs Act 1936 was passed to ensure continued public access and use of the Downs and a measure of public control and management consistent with the interests of corporate and private owners. Today the Downs are open to a range of uses regulated by the Epsom and Walton Downs Regulation Act 1984 which superseded the 1936 Act. Racehorse training activity has priority over all other users before midday each day and in addition there are over 20km of hack areas.

There are six Borough Councillors, three racehorse representatives and a Trainer's representative on the Management Committee. Epsom and Ewell Borough Council employs a dedicated team of downskeepers who maintain the Downs on a day to day basis and various documents and Byelaws govern the current use.

One of our E.S.C. committee members - Angela Clifford - represents us on a consultative body but she has no voting rights. We consider the Downs to be a very important part of the Borough giving status, employment and protection to the area for our residents and offering, we understand, the third largest training facility in the country. The trainers pay a fee, per horse, to use the Downs for training and we support their right to use the area without worry from loose dogs that might harass the nervous race horses.

Hidden in the trees on the far side of the Downs is Downs House which is believed to date back to the 1780s and was once the training yard of the unbeatable Eclipse, a thoroughbred from which 80% of today's bloodstock is thought to be descended. Eclipse won 18 races and is remembered in the phrase 'Eclipse first and the rest nowhere'. Ralph Sherwood and his family occupied the house and he trained for Sir Gilbert Heathcote and in 1838 won



the Derby with Amato. His sons Tom and Robert were successful jockeys. Tom continued training and in 1888 the family purchased Downs House. They entertained Fred Archer and other famous jockeys until Tom died in 1923 and Helen Sherwood who remained there until 1942 reminisced about the Derby 'Its not just a race for me it's all I live for'. Epsom and Ewell Borough Council purchased Downs House in 1944. There was a New Sherwood School in Worple Road for some years after WW2 and I should be interested to know if there was a connection with the family. Rather neglected over recent years, the house and yard are now for sale and it is to hoped that they will be occupied by a trainer.

The first recorded race meeting on Epsom Downs was in 1661 and The Oaks was established in 1779. The first Derby winner was Diomed owned by Sir Charles Bunbury, but he lost the right to name the race, by the toss of a coin, to the Earl of Derby

We wish our members a good summer and hope to see many of you at our Buffet Supper and other events.

I acknowledge help from Bidwells, the sales agents, for material from their brochure. **Harry Corben**

PLANNING APPLICATIONS

25 Alexandra Road: This is another address with a long planning history, my own file going back to 2002! It is the last Victorian House in this part of Alexandra Road, is locally listed and there is much pressure against demolition. Two applications for redevelopment with 14 flats have in the past been permitted on appeal, but not implemented for various reasons. A more recent one in 2013 was dismissed but only for lack of affordable housing; the inspector was not impressed by the merits of the house as a heritage asset but commented favourably on the stained glass windows. A new application for 10 flats was considered at the July Planning Committee with a recommendation to permit and a condition to reinstate the windows. It was also noted that a recent Government statement instructed Local Planning Authorities not to seek affordable housing or contributions in sites of 10 units or less. Our friend and former Committee member Mike Ford spoke as an objector and urged refusal or deferment and mentioned a possible alternative refurbishment proposal. A long debate, with some Members seeming to believe that locally listed buildings needed planning permission for demolition - which they don't - ended in another refusal. Although I wrote to say we would like the building to remain, there seemed to be little valid planning justification and the decision does seem strange.

Nescot Housing development: At the same Committee the revised, and greatly improved, layout for the housing development was agreed unanimously.

Priam Lodge Stables, Burgh Heath Road: The latest application, described in the last Newsletter, for four detached houses on the site of the former stables has now been approved, almost inevitably in view of the appeal decision. Following the new Government statement about affordable housing no condition was imposed, but we are pleased to see one requiring a management plan covering the management, conservation and maintenance of the grassland area to the south of the site, including future maintenance responsibility. Whether this can be properly enforced remains to be seen.

39, Manor Green Road: The sixth attempt to build in the back garden of this house, fronting Hamilton Close, claims to satisfy the reasons for the dismissal of the last appeal. We don't think so and have objected that the proposed tiny bungalow would still introduce an alien element into the road and would not reflect the established layout and special character of the area.

Ford's motor showroom: Following the application for change of use and alterations to the Ford showrooms in East Street, an application has now been made about a site in Blenheim Road on the Longmead Industrial Estate. It is therefore interesting to note that this seems to be where they will be.

Proposed Doctors' Practice, Ashley Road: From time to time I have mentioned that the Ashley Road frontage of the new Courts site residential development was built with permission for a medical practice. Over many years planning permission has been refused for change of use to housing, supported by appeal decisions. The delay was caused by lack of NHS funding and the announcement earlier this year that a successful financial formula had been found was greatly welcomed. I understand, however, that the money has still not arrived. This is very disappointing and alarming in view of the current moves on budget restriction.

Dairy site, Alexandra Road: Our attention was drawn to a colourful leaflet distributed to local residents "Bringing Aldi to Epsom". It was from planning consultants and their proposal is to build an Aldi supermarket with 65 parking places on the site of the former dairy in Alexandra Road at the fiveways junction. E-mails sprang to life among your Committee and as a result I wrote to the consultants expressing our alarm at this prospect. For two very good reasons. Firstly that the siting of shopping should be carefully controlled in the interests of the Town Centre, a location for a small supermarket having already been identified in the Upper High Street/Depot development brief, and secondly that this level of parking and traffic movement at the fiveways junction was unacceptable. It is my view, shared by others, that the Town Centre is already too spread out and would benefit by being more compact, not by enlargement. The dairy site is already identified in the Local Plan documents as suitable for housing development and we entirely agree with this. These comments are of course about the use of the dairy site, not about the proposed user.

Alan Baker

CONSERVATION

There have not been many controversial planning applications affecting listed buildings or conservation areas submitted since the last newsletter. Out of 33 applications looked at since the AGM, just two letters have been written on your behalf, only one of which is note worthy.

Our letter was in connection with the former Royal British Legion building in West Street for which a change of use from a club to a children's nursery was sought. The building is Grade II listed and is in the Town Centre Conservation Area. The proposals seem sensible and well thought out with the exception of the parking and access arrangements which, restricted by site limitations, looked inadequate, as is so often the case in such locations. However, this application is similar in this respect to the conversion to a nursery of the Old School House in Hook Road, which was granted approval on appeal. We suggested that experience here would be a useful indicator of the acceptability of the restricted access and limited parking provision included in this application.



Although it is not on our patch, we were recently delighted to learn that Bourne Hall Library has been listed Grade II along with several other libraries including the British Library, opposite St Pancras Station. The listing is dated 30th April 2015 and the reasons for the designation are:

'Bourne Hall Library and Social Centre, of 1967-70 by A.G.Sheppard Fidler and Associates, is listed at Grade II for the following reasons:

Architectural interest: a striking design, notable for its space-age flair and the generous, top-lit principal interior space;

Plan form: the circular layout is well-organised, legible and flexible;

Historic interest: as an ambitious example of the expansion of the library service and the integration of community facilities and disabled access.'



The citation gives a lot more information about the history of the site and details of the building including its materials and structure. If you would like to see more about this, the List Entry Number is 1425772.

Wearing another hat, I have been involved in a very modest project which is hugely influenced by its location in a Grade II listed park containing a Grade II* house. Inevitably, anything in such a location will stir up all sorts of issues and some strong emotions which seemed to me, at times, to be perhaps somewhat unfounded and unconstructive. So I did a little digging to see if I could find out what basic ideas might lie behind listed status. This was a very instructive exercise and I found the following two statements by English Heritage:

Listing does not freeze a building in time. It simply means that listed building consent must be applied for in order to make any changes to that building which might affect its special interest. Listed buildings can be altered, extended and sometimes even demolished within government planning guidance. The local authority uses listed building consent to make decisions that balance the site's historic significance against such other issues as its function, condition or viability.

While the 'Register' (of Parks and Gardens) seeks to discover sites of special historic interest, it is today's landscape that it is concerned with, rather than some lost landscape of the past.

These statements seem very fair to me. We have suggested on other occasions that some adaptation would seem desirable if it allows a listed building to remain in active use, rather than allow it to fall into disrepair and perhaps eventually be lost forever. It would seem that this is what lies behind the statements. Many old houses are themselves an amalgam of styles with additions to an original building taking place over many years. While historical interest is of the great importance, style, perhaps, is equally so, but it also involves taste.

The building I am referring to above is Ashted Park; it is an impressive building but not everyone is persuaded about its merits: this is Ian Nairn and Nikolaus Pevsner in 'The Buildings of England':



ASHTEAD PARK. An ugly house but a very instructive one, showing how an insensitive late C18 architect could short-circuit the Regency altogether and produce a building that could pass for the mid C19.....An uncompromising stock-brick house of seven by three bays with single-storey wings altered in the C19. But the florid detail apparently original, and more Louis Quinze than anything else...

Nikolaus Pevsner, who died in 1983, was no slouch. Apart from writing, or co-writing, a series of books describing all the buildings of note throughout the UK, county by county, he was Professor of History of Art at Birkbeck College, Slade Professor of Fine Art at Cambridge and a Gold Medallist of the Royal Institute of British Architects.

Finally, it seems that issues connected with traffic in the town centre are hotting up. The Society is likely to be involved with this in the coming weeks so – please - re-read what I had written about this in the last edition of the Newsletter and let us have your views especially about any alternative ideas you might have, about the locations of bus-stops and pedestrian crossing points, limiting traffic speed to 20 mph and the removal of the central reserve along the western end of the High Street. **Rob Austen**

LANGLEY VALE CENTENARY WOOD

On 3rd & 4th July, the Woodland Trust organised a display to show the state of their plans, in advance of a formal planning application, for the area surrounding the entrance to the parking area and visitor centre. The display was possibly not as well attended as it might have been as a result of both little advance warning and publicity and the decision to close the road down to Langley Vale from both directions to undertake water service repairs!

The plans include widening of Headley Road from the junction with Downs Road, removing some trees for safety reasons to improve site lines, provision of a main car park and overflow, 250 spaces in total, and a basic visitor centre, at present envisaged as just a covered area of about 30 m². Suggestions we made include the essential provision of toilets and the opportunity to provide basic refreshment facilities for teas, coffees, ice creams etc. The reaction of the Woodland Trust representatives was to admit their inexperience with providing more than a woodland to walk in!

They had a number of laminated maps showing habitat areas, multi-user paths and hard paths for disabled access, one of which is shown with apologies for the poor photograph quality – neither ideal lighting (evening sun) nor a skilled camera operator!

Alternatively, they can be viewed on the ECS website at:-

<http://epsomcivicsociety.org.uk/2015/08/06/outline-plans-for-the-centenary-wood-from-the-woodland-trust/> (Copy this link into your browser to access the page directly or just go to epsomcivicsociety.org.uk and click on the post in “Recent Posts on the right hand side of the home page)



With regard to the provision of hard paths, we suggested that the section of Sheep Walk between the two paths leading down to it be included so as to provide a circular route.

Mark Bristow

Ian West's Walk 21/6/15.

Some 20+ members of the Society accompanied Ian West on his annual walk of discovery. We gathered outside the Assembly Rooms in the Market Place. Ian said he was pleased that the name had been kept and in fact this is the only one of its kind still remaining in use in the U.K. Built in 1690 as the New Tavern or Assembly Rooms, the building had sash windows - an unusual innovation. Ian described other features of the building.

We looked across the High Street to the shops which had changed hands on numerous occasions and had at times served as taverns. During WWI one of them had been opened as a post office to serve the thousands of men from the University and Public Schools Brigade which formed in Epsom in 1914. A photograph showed some of them still in their civilian clothing.

We then went over to the Albion and Ian described the many changes in this site which at one time belonged to John Livingstone. He set up a rival to the Epsom Wells and bought and closed the original. A brick wall on the garage site is probably dated to this time. When Livingstone died in 1727 the flow of visitors gradually dwindled and other spa towns - Bath and Tunbridge - took over.

Across the street, The Marquess of Granby was, at one time, the Horse and Groom. Ian remarked on the influence of butchers who bought or financed new properties over the years and there were too many changes to list. The Personal Agent premises still contain a 'cashiers booth' similar to those common in retail shops. Ian referred to the changes in the shops opposite the 'Marquess'. We continued into West St. where a building once referred to as the Manor House, but never used as such, became a hotel from 1951-1971 where there were 19 bedrooms, and B & B cost 16/-.

We concluded our walk outside the sad looking former British Legion H.Q. We understand that the building has been largely gutted but the new owners hope to open a children's nursery and will retain the main exterior features.

Many thanks Ian for a most interesting and informative walk and it did not rain.

Harry Corben

Outing to Royal Holloway College and Runnymede- Thursday, 30th July (Sheila's version)

The size of the college building of Royal Holloway proved to be even greater than expected. Our guide, Richard Williams, was a chemistry teacher there and an amazing historian as well. The layout is of two courtyards with statues of Queen Victoria in one and the founder, Sir Thomas Holloway and his wife, Jane, in the other. She suggested it should be the first women's college and it opened with twenty students - they must have rattled around there although they were housed in the West Wing. It is modelled on French chateaux particularly Chambord - but he wanted it to be larger than any so it is two feet wider and longer. Also he collected the latest Victorian paintings to adorn the Picture Gallery as a rival to Vassar



girls' college collection in America. After a delicious lunch surrounded by the paintings, Lee, our driver, parked on the bank of the River Thames at Runnymede and ECS members and friends then explored the John F. Kennedy Memorial. We also saw the artwork by Hew Locke to mark the 800th anniversary of the sealing of Magna Carta and also the American Bar Association Memorial. The artwork is called The Jurors and comprises twelve intricately worked bronze chairs standing in two lines facing one another. Each chair incorporates symbols and imagery representing concepts of law and key moments in the

struggle for freedom, rule of law and equal rights throughout the world. The layout invites visitors to sit, reflect and discuss the implications of the histories and issues depicted.

The full coach enjoyed a grand outing, in gorgeous weather, mostly finishing the day with a welcome ice-cream watching the river and boats passing by.

The Royal Holloway College Open Day is on Sunday, 13th September during Heritage weekend.

Royal Holloway College and Runnymede (*Harry's version*)

An accident just outside Ashted closed the A24 as we assembled for our outing but the coach driver made a detour and those who were joining at Ashted quickly moved to Ashted Peace Memorial Hall. Mobile phones do have their uses.

We made good time and were shown the main parts of Royal Holloway College. A remarkable building based on a very large French Chateau as wished by Thomas Holloway (1800-1883) who made his millions from patent medicines and found it easier to make money than spend it. Originally a college for women, but now open to some 9000 students from London University. Queen Victoria opened the college after some pressure and also granted the 'Royal' title. We had an excellent sandwich lunch in the Art Gallery where there are at least three well known paintings and many others which excited the art lovers. Our guide was truly excellent!



We left the college as planned and drove the short distance to Runnymede where we entered 'the most famous meadow in the world' and enjoyed the many monuments and memorials of the 1215 Magna Carta. Piers Nicholson regaled us with the meaning of that momentous event and we walked along the River Thames back to the coach.

Some of the participants thought it deserved a 100% mark and we felt that Sheila Wadsworth had truly done it again. Many many thanks Sheila for a wonderful day.

Harry Corben

ANNUAL BUFFET SUPPER PARTY - Friday 16th October

Do come along to St. Joseph's Church Hall, St. Margaret's Drive, off Dorking Road, Epsom for our Annual Get Together. We still have space for members, friends and families and would be delighted to see you there. Cost is £21 each - timing 7.30 to 10.15 p.m. with entertainment from John White, actor and entertainer, on "Henry VIII's Life and Palaces", plus a delicious buffet served at your table and a welcome drink. Free parking is beside the hall. The booking form is on page 8.

DINNER THEATRE AT THE MILL, SONNING - Saturday 5th December

Tickets are still available for the trip to The Mill at Sonning for a Christmas lunch and a performance of "Stepping Out" by Richard Harris. The cost of £57 covers a two-course lunch with coffee or tea, the performance, coach and tip, and a programme between two people. Non members may book from 1st September. The three pick-up points are Epsom Downs 10.20 a.m., the Methodist Church 10.30 a.m. and Ashted 10.40a.m. The estimated departure time from The Mill will be about 5.15 p.m. The booking form is on page 8. If booking for both outings, please use separate cheques. For any help you need please contact me, Sheila Wadsworth - 01372-273517.

*(Photographs of the Royal Holloway College are by Ishbel Kenward; others are by Malcolm Boyd)
(I make no apology for printing both Sheila's and Harry's reports on the outing to Holloway College as they both emphasise different aspects. Editor)*

APPLICATION FOR THE ANNUAL BUFFET SUPPER - Friday 16th October

Name/s.....

Address.....

Tel. No.

No. of tickets @ £21 pp **Total cost £**.....

Any dietary or allergy requirements? Yes/No Please list

Please return this application slip with your cheque made out to "Epsom Civic Society" and a stamped addressed envelope to Sheila Wadsworth, The Chestnuts, Farm Lane, Ashted KT21 1LJ (01372-27517)

APPLICATION FOR THE DINNER THEATRE – THE MILL AT SONNING

Saturday 5th December. The cost covers 2-course meal, coffee/tea, play, one programme for every two people, the coach travel and driver’s tip.

Members Name/s.....

.....

Address.....

.....

Tel. No......

No of tickets @ £57pp..... **Total cost**.....

Any dietary or allergy requirements? Yes/No please list.....

.....

Coach collection. Please indicate.

(A) 10.20 a.m. Epsom Downs, the car park behind the tea hut by Tattenham Corner

(B) 10.30 a.m. the Methodist Church, Epsom

(C) 10.40 a.m. The Street, Ashted

Please return this application form with your cheque made out to “Epsom Civic Society” and a stamped addressed envelope to Sheila Wadsworth, The Chestnuts, Farm Lane, Ashted KT21 1LJ (01372 273517)

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