

THE CITIZEN



The Newsletter of the Berkhamsted Citizens Association

September 1995

Profile on Gordon Bluck



Chairman of our Town Amenities Sub-Committee

Gordon is a mere 43 years old, has lived in Berkhamsted since 1987, and has two children.

He describes himself as one of the few of that endangered species, a Bank Manager, and is based in Victoria in the West End. Despite commuting every day, Gordon makes time to lead our team that scrutinises and comments on all planning applications and handles other matters affecting the amenities of the Town. (His latest report is on page 3.)



*Victorian replica lamp-
Enhancement or unconvincing fake?*

Cables under our Feet

“Will Berkhamsted ever get back to normal?” a bewildered townsman asked me the other day, having picked his way across the piles of soil excavated by the cable layers from their trench in the narrow footpath. One tries to cheer people up. “More investment in the Town's infrastructure”, I assured him, “setting us up for the 21st century, all in the interest of progress, entertainment, communications and education.”

He looked sceptical. “Did you read”, I went on, “that not only will you have access to umpteen television programmes, but each one of the available channels will be able to provide ten million bits of information into your living room every second?” This mind-boggling statistic for some reason still left him unimpressed. “What would I do with all that?” was his response.

That indeed is the question. My generation will largely be happy to let it all happen in blissful ignorance of what we are missing. Those who are now children will grow up with having this amazing facility in their homes, and take it all in their stride. Those in-between may wish they could ignore it all, but probably will have to make some sort of effort.

In the meantime, whether you want cables or not, your pavement has been or will be dug up by Fitzpatrick, the contractors, in what seem to me to be a pretty haphazard way. There is not a straight trench in the Town, and they look pretty awful, even after reinstatement.



*Low tech. trenches for
high tech. cables in
Holliday Street*

The High Street Again

My comments in the last issue of the Citizen on the changes in the Town Centre prompted a swift response from Mr Guy Patterson who lives at the west end of the High Street.

‘What has been achieved is only a fake Victorian scene, unconvincing and based on a fallacy, at enormous cost and only half completed’ he writes. ‘It attempts to recreate something which was never there in the first place, while being unable to control the one factor which has most altered the appearance of the town: the road vehicle. The traffic calming has done little or nothing to affect this.’

There is not space to print all the letter, but it goes on in this critical vein. Other comments are still coming in, some of them more favourable now that things have settled down.

Perhaps more on this in the next issue.

The Town's Trees

Every time an important tree goes from Berkhamsted there is a sense of permanent loss. So it was with the Indian Bean Tree (*Catalpa*) at the entrance to Lower Kings Road car park. Its days were numbered, but the final coup de grace was prematurely administered by a skip lorry. We are trying to get it replaced by another one (see page 3).

140 years ago Henry Nash, a local historian, deplored the felling of the elm trees in the High Street. Other writers later lamented the loss of a famous walnut tree near Billet Lane, and old prints show tall Lombardy poplars along the High Street near Rectory Lane, all long since gone. In the last three years there have been loud protests at the felling of willows and poplars along the canal.



Lime Trees by the Crystal Palace

In point of fact looking at old aerial photographs you can see that Berkhamsted is a far leafier place now than it was before the last war, mainly due to trees growing up in gardens rather than in public spaces. What we have lost are large street trees, and these are not being replaced. In fact, it is the Borough Council's policy not to plant any trees in the streets at all except where there is a grass verge. They claim the problems are too great with mains and drains and the roots lifting up the paving.

In the High Street the trees are the responsibility of the County Council (even though the road has now been 'de-trunked'), and fortunately H.C.C. has a less rigid approach about street trees than the Borough, as the recent planting will testify.

It is unlikely, though, that we will ever see big forest trees again being planted in our streets. One large tree to my mind is worth ten small ones, and if we can't have them in the streets then we should get them planted in open spaces wherever possible. What an enhancement the horse chestnuts are, for example,

to the Moor, and what an opportunity we now have with the Canalside Project to put in a few more trees which will mature into ones of substance.

THE CANALSIDE PROJECT

Berkhamsted Citizens Association is represented by Paul Gilbert on the committee planning the improvement of the canal side and the surrounding area through the Town - the CARP project, as it is called.

It has been going on for some time now and is a joint venture between Dacorum Borough Council, Berkhamsted Town Council and the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust. The aim is to enhance the area and make a pleasant place to walk in and generally to enjoy without being made aware that you are so close to the Town centre.

David Smedley, the Head of Parks and Open Spaces at the Borough writes to report that the first phase of the works are underway and include:-

- Clearing the growth and rubbish from the railway fence through the full length of Canal Fields.
- Clearing the growth and rubbish from the two tunnel entrances and expose the brickwork.
- Exposing the railway lines which carried the coal from the railway to the old gas works.
- Clearing the growth and rubbish from the bypass channel alongside the canal.
- Clearing the growth and rubbish in the area at the top near the lock.
- Along the length of the Bulbourne clearing the growth and rubbish from the banks.
- Removing the fallen or dangerous branches from the trees on the bankside.
- Removing the beds of shrubs planted a few years ago as they are not indigenous to the area.
- Filling in some gaps in the towpath hedge and making others to encourage people to use the area.
- Planting new indigenous trees along the side of the canal in Canal Fields.



The Canal through Berkhamsted

Why not have a look at how things are going when you are next that way?

Report of the Town Amenities Sub-Committee

by Gordon Bluck

Following the busy time in the summer there has been less for our committee to consider, but we are heartened when we read the minutes of the new Town Council that their understandable lack of experience is made up for by the work they put in on the Development Control side and the other committees affecting the town. Our respective views on a planning application are often similar if not the same. Since the last newsletter we have been involved with the following:

- 1) A proposed new garage block at Gossoms Lodge would have changed the character of a striking listed building. We have therefore objected.
- 2) At the request of the Beacon Villages Society we have reiterated our objection to the proposed Pitstone dump direct to the Planning Inspector.
- 3) We have discovered that despite the central core of the town being in the Conservation Area provided new windows in houses do not stick out from the front of a building they can be of any style no matter how ugly and inappropriate. The regulations can be tightened up but only if the majority of residents approve. As a committee we are trying to see if someone has the time to take this forward.
- 4) We have recommended to Dacorum Borough Council that the Catalpa tree knocked down in Lower Kings Road be replaced with a new mature root-balled tree, hopefully of the same species.
- 5) We are very concerned by the siting of the new equipment cabinets in the Conservation Area by Telecental Communications and have written to Dacorum BC. They tell us that formal planning permission is not needed as the operators only need to submit a notification seeking 'prior approval'. The Council only has 28 days to respond, otherwise the cabinet is installed. The BCA will be consulted on each occasion and has to respond in seven days. This is a major concession as there is no legal need to do this.



These cottages in Castle Street are in the Conservation Area, but their appearance is not fully protected by planning regulations

- 6) An objection was raised to the proposed erection of a dwelling on land adjoining Alton, Kitsbury Road on the grounds of a) it is in the conservation area; b) it is out of keeping in its axis with Kitsbury Terrace; c) impact on parking.
- 7) In keeping with our objection to a house being built in the gardens of Oakleigh, Shootersway Lane, we objected again to this over-development.
- 8) On the matter of the loss of the open air swimming pool we have written to Dacorum B. C. to suggest that a feasibility study is done to check the financial viability of restoring this well loved amenity.
- 9) We are delighted to report that after our objection to the development at 9/11 Kingsdale Road which went to appeal the Inspector agreed to turn down the application.

From Christopher Talbot-Ponsonby, the Membership Secretary:

Membership now stands at 615 households, or around 1120 individuals. We hate to have to mention the subject but quite a number of members (24) have not let us have their subscriptions for 1995. Regrettably we need money to survive and the only source of income is your subscriptions. It is very easy to forget so we hope you will not mind being reminded.

For the sixth year we have decided to enclose renewal notices for next year to those concerned. When five year subscriptions were first introduced, nearly 65% took up the invitation to pay in this way, thus saving the hassle of being reminded each year (and taking advantage of not having to pay any increase that may occur during the five year period. It would make my life and that of your deliverer that much easier if you would consider taking out a five year subscription.

BERKHAMSTED CITIZENS ASSOCIATION ENVIRONMENT AWARD 1995

Please let us have your nominations for this as soon as possible, but not later than 15 January 1996. Any member of the Association is entitled to make a recommendation for the Committee to consider. Whatever is proposed (it need not necessarily be a building) must have been substantially completed before the end of this calendar year.

STOP PRESS: BCA was one of only three Berkhamsted organisations (the Town Council and the Town Hall Trust were the other two) to be invited to a meeting to consider a Conservation Area Partnership (C.A.P. - not to be confused with CARP above!) for the Town. English Heritage will support the scheme, but their grant must be matched with funding from other sources (businesses, Borough Council, fund-raising etc).

The scheme is expected to last three years. Broadly the first year would be spent on improvements in the central area, such as minor repairs to important buildings, alterations to shop fronts and fascia boards and the like. The Swan Project and the Rex building might also benefit. From the second year the grant will be available on a 50% basis to householders who want to repair, make improvements or even reverse former misguided 'improvements'. Neighbours in a terrace might work together on schemes.

The success of the whole project depends on the enthusiasm and our ability to act quickly to take full advantage of it. There will be public meeting, exhibitions, leaflets, design guidance notes organised by the Borough Council. Your Committee is very keen that the BCA should play a leading role in this project.

There should be a lot more to report in the next issue of the Citizen.

Chairman:

Keith Gay, The Glade, Kingsdale Road, HP4 3BP 01442 864346

Membership Secretary:

Christopher Talbot-Ponsonby, 38 Kitsbury Road, HP4 3EA 01442 865882

Citizen Editor:

John Cook, 21 Castle Street, HP4 2DW 01442 866278

Coming Events

Our Christmas Celebration will be on Friday, 15th December at 8.00pm, in the Great Hall of the Town Hall. The carol singing will be lead by a choir from Ashlyns School who will also provide some entertainment while you rest your voices.

A mince pie and a glass of wine will be included in the price of the ticket, and an invitation is included with this newsletter. Graham Spittle, Chairman of our Events Sub-Committee, says that the licence we have will enable us to sell unlimited numbers of additional glasses of mulled wine to anyone whose throat needs further lubrication.

There is an opportunity of exercise after any excesses during the Christmas. Season by joining the traditional *New Year's Day ramble to Aldbury. Meet outside Berkhamsted Railway Station at 10.30am.* Usual lunching arrangements. Details on request if you have not been on one of our rambles before.

Our February meeting is again in the Great Hall when someone who certainly needs no introduction, **Brian Bennett, will give a talk entitled 'Both sides of the Canvas' on 8th February at 8.00pm.**



Alsford Wharf Flats.

A candidate for last year's Environment award