

THE CITIZEN

The Newsletter of the Berkhamsted Citizens Association



June 1997

Profile



Margaret Phillips

BCA Committee Member

Margaret Phillips has been a BCA committee member since 1986, during which time she has done a great deal more than just attend its meetings. For ten years she carried out the important function of minutes secretary of the Town Amenities Sub-Committee, and additionally for four years Margaret was membership secretary. To these duties she has added preparing and distributing posters for events, arranging speakers and booking venues. Not least, she is one of the workers behind the scenes at most of the Association's events, making coffee, pouring wine or whatever is asked of her.

Born in London, she started married life in Hampstead. Margaret's career was largely spent being secretary to important people in a variety of professions and places: a BBC producer in London; a headmaster in Cheshire and the President of the Royal Scottish Academy in Edinburgh.

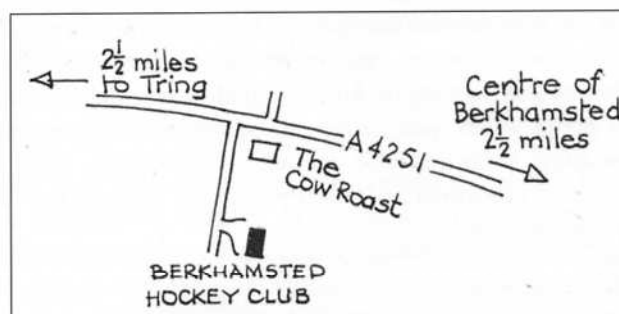
Margaret and her husband Ken (whom she confusingly calls 'Phil') moved to Berkhamsted in 1980. On his retirement Ken took on the roles of secretary to Berkhamsted Town Hall Trust and its manager, while Margaret, in addition to her BCA responsibilities is a volunteer helper at the Cancer Research Campaign Shop and a guide at Chenies Manor House. For over 30 years she served on various Barnardo committees.

Her prime leisure interest is art, as she says, 'dabbling at it', and she enjoys music, theatre, cinema, aerobatics, badminton, and travel, especially visiting their younger son who lives in sunny Tuscany.

Forthcoming Events

Our programme for the 1997/98 season starts in the autumn as usual, and details of future events will be given in the next newsletter.

For this year's *Summer Wine* we have chosen a new venue: the club house of Berkhamsted Hockey Club, which is a little out of town. It is on the left hand side of the narrowish lane which leads off the A4251 to Tring, to the left, just past the Cow Roast public house. The map below shows where to find it.



The date for this popular event is **Saturday, 28th June at 8.0 pm.**

When should we meet?

BCA meetings are nearly always held on Thursdays. At the last committee meeting we discussed whether we should vary the day of the week on which our meetings are normally held, to help for example the members who always go to bellringing practice on Thursday evenings and therefore miss most of the meetings.

With the information at its disposal the Committee decided on balance it was probably better to stick to a regular day of the week, and Thursdays seemed to suit more people than any other evening. But the Association belongs to its members and if there is a strong enough case the practice could be altered. Please let us know if you have views on this.

Mr E.J. Talbot-Ponsonby

Graham Spittle, BCA's Chairman, writes:

Many Association members will have learned with regret of the death of Evelyn Talbot-Ponsonby on 23rd April this year. His many different interests and achievements will be recorded elsewhere, not least in the memories of those who were privileged to know him. However, it should be recorded here that he was elected as a life member of the Association in 1979 following distinguished service on the committee for some ten years from 1962. He was chairman for two years from 1966 and vice-chairman for two separate years before and after that. He took a great interest in the Association right up to and during his last illness and will be much missed.

Report of the Town Amenities Sub-Committee

Gordon Block reports:



'The Swan' Enviromental Award Winner

Following my last report the flood of applications and matters needing attention of this committee has abated and we feel less under pressure.

Those of you who attended the AGM will know that David Brunt, the Association's vice-chairman, made yet another excellent presentation regarding the selection for the Environmental Award, and The Swan was the worthy winner, with the new Waitrose store, the 'Dump' and the new offices in Boxwell Road receiving commendations. Over 20 nominees were considered and this is pleasing as we have had few entries in recent years.



Runner Up.: Waitrose's Cool Colonnade

Incidentally, The Castle housing development was withdrawn by the committee from the award as they still have to replace the balcony and because the hand-cut brick arches have been painted over.

Following detailed work by Berkhamsted Town Council and support from the Crime Prevention Panel we looked again at the sites of the proposed closed circuit TV cameras and suggested the following minor alterations:

- 1) Moving the cameras from outside Johnson's bookmakers to the under-railway tunnel at South Park Gardens.
- 2) We showed concern regarding moving the camera from Barclays Bank wall to William's greengrocers as we felt it important to look down Lower Kings Road.
- 3) That the camera in Water Lane car park be moved to Berkeley Court so it can look down Water Lane.

4) The camera in Victoria Road be moved to Butts Meadow, an area where many feel threatened.

5) We agree with the Town Council that the best position for the camera near the station is on top of the Mill building.



Best position for a camera: On top of the Mill Building

Unfortunately the effect of this fine tuning is to upset the bureaucratic timescales of the decision-making process and we are looking at the autumn before it is decided.

On other matters, an appeal has been lodged regarding yet another development in Kingsdale Road, this time behind No. 11. Our stance remains the same and the inspector has been reminded of our strong objection.

Berkhamsted Collegiate School has woken up to the fact that the best, but not ideal, site for the new joint Junior School is on the Beeches/St David's/Russell grounds. The Association pointed this out a year ago at the beginning of our submission to Dacorum Planning and the governors would have seen this at the time as it is part of the public record. As I prepare this report I am awaiting copies of the plans and we will want to ensure that with the proposed development in the conservation area they are well and sensibly designed.

I understand that a tree preservation order has been served on all trees in the grounds of Edgeworth House, the Grade 2* house near Billet Lane, and this should ensure that they are maintained in good condition.

Reports of attempts to draw up plans to develop the land on the large field behind Hunters Park right through to Ivy House Lane are reaching our ears. With developers now owning the land and obtaining access from Hunters Park this frankly appals me, with another 'Executive Ghetto' in the making at the cost of the Green Belt. Watch this space.



Threatened: Green Belt Land behind Hunters Park

As those of you who attend its public meetings will know, The Berkhamsted Town Centre Forum has commissioned a "clutter survey" of the High Street. Their draft Action Plan was distributed and discussed briefly at the meeting on 2 April. It contains a good analysis of the problems and some sensible suggestions for action. But what a pity that the designer of our new-look town centre did not have the benefit of their views before all the work was done!



Official disgraceful shoddiness: Back view of a new road sign in the Conservation Area outside Abbey National

It seems to me that clutter falls into two categories: the physical, that is, things that get in the way and visual, that is, things that make a negative visual impact. On 11th April I walked along the High Street from Kings Road to Garden Field Lane and back again. This is what I noted. First, the physical clutter. There were no less than twenty-eight "A" boards outside shops. There is a nice balance to be achieved between a busy, thriving commercial scene and obstruction of the public footway. There is also a balance to be found between putting signs on private property (often the flat piece of pavement near the shops) and on the footpath (often the sloping piece of pavement that pedestrians avoid).

Next there is the physical clutter put there by the designers. I counted eleven spurious hitching rails for one's horse. When did you last see a shopper on a horse in the High Street? A welcome contrast was the increased number of useful benches where one can rest one's feet from shopping or sit in the sun and gossip.

Secondly, the visual clutter. This starts before one enters Berkhamsted with three "road narrows" signs. Then we have some spurious walls, a pinch point highlighted in green and lots of bollards announcing the entrance to the town. I noted seven (probably illegal) signs put on lamp-posts by house developers and a huge hoarding on the flank wall of No 103.



Clutter by the end of Prince Edward Street

Another thing that struck a discordant note was the flower baskets half-way up the lamp-posts. This seems a bit twee and wholly unnatural. After all, flowers don't grow up lamp-posts! A pleasant contrast was the trough of flowers outside the Goat and some wonderful displays in front gardens. Another traditional feature of which I approve is the red 'phone box near Dean Incent's (as opposed to the modern 'phone box at Swing Gate Lane).



Traditional 'phone box' approved of.

If members have strong views I would be happy to convey them to the Forum.

Colin Garrett is a BCA Committee member and represents the Association on the Town Centre Forum

De-littering the Bulbourne

Stephen Halliday writes:

A few weeks ago Patricia O'Callaghan and I volunteered to keep an eye on the Three Close Lane cemetery, keeping it clear of litter, looking for dangerous trees and instigating the autumn and spring clear-ups in which many members of St Peter's congregation participate. Patricia and I have informally agreed that I will try to stop it deteriorating by keeping it clear of litter, while she will try to make it better by planting flowers and encouraging others to do likewise.

I know that Patricia would appreciate any other members of the community can give. If you have any surplus bulbs or hardy and tolerant plants such as bluebells and forget-me-nots please try to make the time to distribute them around the cemetery. This large plot - two or three acres I estimate - in a residential area is potentially an asset to the town and, with a little more care, it could be very attractive.

Litter is at present hideously evident in the dry bed of the Bulbourne, much of it having been previously concealed by murky waters. However, we could regard this as an opportunity rather than a problem. If every member of the Citizens Association resolved, over the next four weeks, to fill one carrier bag with litter from the bed of the stream then, by the time the water returns it could be greeted by a cleaner environment than it has known for years. A good place to start would be at the foot of the steps leading down to the towpath from the Lower Kings Road bridge where there is a particular accumulation of rubbish.



Litter in the dried-up Bulbourne by Lower Kings Road

It doesn't have to be organised. It just needs each of us, individually, to make a contribution when convenient. I will resolve to collect my bagfull this weekend.

Who will join me?

Dates on buildings

One of the features of a buildings which can make them more interesting is having the date when they were built on them. Regrettably this practice has almost died out. The last major public building in Berkhamsted to have a date on it was the post office building of 1958, although if you look closely at some more recent buildings, such as the William Fiske flats (1978) in Castle Street you may find some sort of small plaque with the date on it.



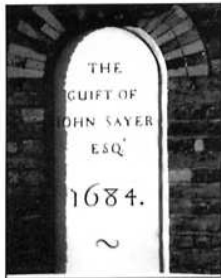
Berkhamsted School - dating from 1584

The earliest date we have on show in Berkhamsted is 1584 on the lychgate of Berkhamsted School in Castle Street, but this refers to when the school was founded and not the date of the lychgate itself, which is only about 100 years old. Further down Castle Street is *The Boote* with the date on the front.



The Boote, 1605. Long closed as a pub.

Another from the 17th century is in the High Street on the Sayer Almshouses: 1684. On the opposite side of the road the old Bourne School building (now the Britannia Building Society) has three coats of arms and three dates over the doorway, the latest of which refer to General Finch who was responsible for rebuilding the school in the middle of the last century. Look out too for old fire markers; there is one above



Three plaques on the Britannia Building Society
Macilroys shop front dated 1726.



'Fire' marker 1726

There are several 19th century buildings in the High Street with dates on them, for example the Town Hall, 1859, the High Victorian building opposite the Goat with the figure 1863 boldly picked out in the brickwork of the facade, and the early example of mock Tudor, 1865 , just

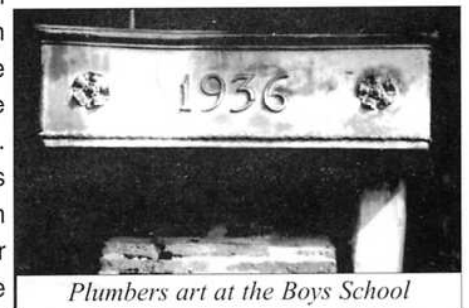


High Victorian of 1863

along past the Rex. From this century we have the Civic Centre, 1938, and the shops opposite Hall Park, 1934, with the monogram EG. The initials are those of Edward

Greene, Graham Greene's uncle, who owned Hall Park, the old mansion which was pulled down in the 30's, as well as a good deal of property at that end of the town.

Back to Berkhamsted Collegiate School Castle Campus, as we must learn to call it; this has a variety of buildings with dates on them. You can test your skill at reading Latin numbers from those which appear on the library and the chapel. Sometimes dates can be found on the rainwater heads (where the roof gutters run



Plumbers art at the Boys School

into the rainwater pipes). A specially appealing feature of the School is a cast lead rainwater head facing the churchyard, which bears the date 1936 - perhaps the last example of the plumber's decorative art in town.

Interest can be added to a walk along the canal by looking out for dates on the lock gates, all of them different, going back to the 1850's. Commuters waiting on Platform 4 may like to try to make out the dates on the rails when the sun is at the right angle. Finally, of course, the churchyard and cemeteries are full of dates.

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