

THE CITIZEN

The Newsletter of the Berkhamsted Citizens Association



September 1997

Profile: Gill Feil



When Gill came on to the BCA Committee she was following in the footsteps of her husband Lovell, who had just finished his term as chairman.

Apart from being an active member of the Town Amenities sub-committee, Gill plays a leading role in arranging our public meetings and social events. This involves more work behind the scenes than many members probably realise; for example, when a general election is called getting all the candidates together and finding an available venue at short notice presents a formidable task. Gill also produces the card which sets down the Association's forthcoming events (a copy of which should be attached to this copy of the newsletter).

Gill and Lovell met when they were both on the administrative staff of the University of London and they have lived in Berkhamsted since 1963. Their three sons - all of whom went on to become doctors - were educated at the town's schools.

Now that they are both retired they enjoy their two grandchildren, travelling, the theatre, the cinema, getting out into the country, visiting stately homes, finding interesting old pubs serving good beer and food - and of course supporting BCA events.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

The Association has arranged three events for October/November:

Sunday, 5th October - The Autumn Ramble



We meet at the junction of Cross Oak Road and Shooters Way at 10.30am for a walk lead by Eric Drake across Chiltern countryside to the hilltop village of Cholesbury. All are welcome.

Thursday, 16th October - Follies Farm Sanctuary :



A talk by Sue Driver,
co-founder of the sanctuary.

Thursday, 20th November - The Chiltern Story :

A talk by Alison Doggett, who teaches at the Collegiate School and was co-author of the excellent book *The Chilterns*.



As usual, both talks will be given in the Great Hall of the Town Hall at 8.00pm.

A PAT ON THE BACK FOR OUR DELIVERERS

Mr Ivan Baker of Ivy House Lane writes:

Thanks to the lady who delivered the CITIZEN to us yesterday. Till now each issue has just appeared in our main box and I have never before seen who delivers it, and it shows there must be some willing volunteers about - a commodity which I know is in very short supply, and so we have to give thanks to those who do find time to give a helping hand without thought of pecuniary reward.

Graham Greene Birthplace Trust

THE FIRST ANNUAL GRAHAM GREENE LECTURE will be given at a public meeting to launch the new Trust at **8 p m on Thursday October 2, 1997**, the 93rd anniversary of Graham Greene's birth, in Deans' Hall, Castle Street. The lecture will be given by Bill West, author of the recently published book 'The Quest for Graham Greene.' The meeting will conclude with a dramatised reading of Graham Greene's short story 'The Innocent' which is set in Berkhamsted.

The Trust is being formed as an educational charity by various local bodies including the Town Council, the Collegiate School, the Citizens Association and the Town Hall Trust. Its main object is: '.....the education of the general public in the life and works of Graham Greene....'. The Town Council has given £500 as a pump priming grant.

Those members of the Association who lived in Berkhamsted in 1974 will recall the visit by Graham Greene and his younger brother, Sir Hugh Greene to a special meeting of the B.C.A. to talk about their schooldays in Berkhamsted. The Gazette's front page headline was 'Famous Greene Brothers give school heads a tanning.' It proudly continued: 'For the BBC to screen two of the famous Greene brothers on the same programme would be regarded as a major achievement. But Berkhamsted Citizens association, without any fuss, got Graham and Sir Hugh to chat and reminisce to a rapt audience.'



*Hugh Greene, Graham Greene, Ken Sherwood,
Berkhamsted 1974*

Perhaps the most memorable incident of the evening was when Mrs Enid Wales, a contemporary of Graham's, whose father was headmaster of the junior department, challenged Graham's description of the great Dr. Fry as a sadist. 'Would my father have accepted that appointment if Dr. Fry had been a sadist?'. The argument between the Greenses and Mrs Wales went on for some time as they all relived incidents of their youth.

Now more than twenty years later Ken Sherwood who was the Citizens Chairman at that meeting is involved

with others in establishing the new Trust. There are a number of ideas as to how the Trust might operate. Many of these aim to interest those who want to find out more about the influence Berkhamsted had on Graham Greene's life and works.

One idea is to hold an annual lecture. If there were sufficient demand this could be expanded into a day conference. Alternatively the lecture could be linked with a film festival, showing films scripted by Graham Greene or based on his books.

A second idea could be an audio-visual presentation. If suitable facilities were available it might be possible to link it with a related exhibition.

Another suggestion is a Town Trail of places mentioned either in Graham's autobiography 'A Sort of Life'; or in his fictional descriptions of Berkhamsted. Many will recall the Berkhamsted scenes in the film of the Human Factor.

The Trail might start at Graham's birthplace, St. John's in Chesham Road. If in the future St. John's were no longer needed by the school, it could become the home of a Graham Greene Museum.



*St. John's, Chesham Road:
Birthplace of Graham Greene*

Other ideas include a booklet 'Graham Greene and Berkhamsted'; and literary and travelling scholarships for young people. Why not come along on 2 October and find out more?

Aftermath

Berkhamsted and District's lively Chamber of Commerce has carried out a survey of its members who have shops in the town to try to assess the effect of the Waitrose 'Kingsgate' development. The survey is not yet complete but the interesting preliminary findings are reviewed in the Chamber's Summer Newsletter.

The conclusions that can be drawn from it are not dramatic, but in some respects surprising. For example, despite their shop now being further away from the town's major supermarket, Boot's business has increased fairly substantially except for certain items like baby goods which Waitrose has taken to stocking. The fact that Waitrose now sell newspapers and magazines is probably the reason for the decline in Gammages' business.

Other shops along the High Street which back onto the Waitrose site generally show an improvement in trade, but there is not much evidence of people shopping in Waitrose and then going to other shops in one trip. This perhaps highlights the major deficiency with the Kingsgate project: its lack of good integration with the rest of the town's major shopping area. There are hints that it may not be too late for this to be remedied, at least partly.



The town's principal shop - behind here somewhere

If you are interested I recommend you get hold of a copy of the Chamber of Commerce's newsletter and read the well presented summary of the survey.

Town Amenities

Gordon Bluck,

Chairman of the Town Amenities Sub-Committee reports:

As regular readers of my reports will remember, August is the time developers and those with marginal planning applications submit them in the hope that all Dacorum Planning Department and the councillors on Development Control Committee are on the beach. Not so these days, as everyone is wise to this old trick. There have been a number of large schemes coming up that we as a committee have commented on on behalf of the Association. In no particular order they are as follows:-

1) A new and improved plan for a 300-pupil junior school incorporating the Russell and St David's buildings between Doctors Commons Road and Kings Road has been submitted. Following feedback from Dacorum Planning the earlier plans I mentioned in my last report were withdrawn for modification as they were frankly misleading in showing the scale of the building from Kings Road, and the rear aspect on to Doctors Commons Road was a three storey slab - and ugly.

Amended plans were shown to an invited group of councillors (Borough and Town) and the relevant planners, and submitted on 6 August. I received a full set within a couple of days. This is typical of the care that Dacorum Council takes to keep the Association informed, and I am very grateful for this extra trouble that they are not legally required to go to. Efforts have been made in the design to blend in the building, but it is very large and imposing. We are particularly concerned regarding the impact on the traffic in Doctors Commons Road despite a new large car park and drop-off point. The School has offered to stagger dropping-



Drop off point in Doctors Common Road

off times from 8.30 to 9.15, but with some parents having several children in different classes the thought of driving from say Cheddington is not practical. Our problem as a committee is that we do not wish to be seen as negative, whilst having concerns regarding a huge building that will be with the town for 50/100 years.

2) We understand there is a proposal to build a second runway at Luton Airport, and a letter has been sent to Berkhamsted Town Council supporting their view that an environmental impact study be undertaken, followed by a public enquiry.

3) Following a number of applications over the years there is a new plan to build a retirement village on the old Cooper's Animal Farm at Berkhamsted Hill. As it looks unlikely that it could be returned to industrial/employment use we have supported the proposal in principle, but with the rider that 140 flats, 33 bungalows and 11 cottages appears to be over-development.. The point has also been made that if this goes ahead we would not wish it to be a precedent for the joining up of Berkhamsted/Potten End/Hemel Hempstead.



*Cooper's Animal Farm
Suitable for a retirement village?*

4) An appeal has been lodged with the Department of the Environment regarding the application to build four detached houses at Fleurfield in Kingsdale Road. We have reiterated our strong objection.

5) The Canalside Project continues to have regular meetings and I attended as Paul Gilbert was on holiday. My reaction was the same as Paul's in that there was plenty of talk but we do not appear to have moved forward much in the last 18 months. I urged the group on behalf of the Association to start even if on a phased basis so that the town can see some benefit. An exhibition and public consultation will take place in September. I hope as many members as possible will attend.

A Personal View *by Colin Garrett*

In the last issue I wrote about clutter in the High Street. One aspect of the visual clutter that I did not mention is the road (and pavement) surfaces. In my youth matters were simple. The road was covered in black tarmac. The pavement was made of paving stones, York stone or concrete slabs. There was a line of granite kerb stones to show where one ended and the other began. The road was lower than the pavement. Children were strictly trained in kerb drill - look right, look left, look right again: if all clear, walk across. How does one now teach a child to cross the entrance to Oaklands?

Now we have no less than ten surfaces! I counted three on the road: black, red and green. I studied the Highway Code to try to discover their meaning. To no avail. Presumably one slows down on the red and speeds up on the green, but the logic needs explaining.

The pavement is even more jumbled. The main surface is a mixture of slabs of different sizes, colours and textures: traditional cobbles, red brick pavements, pale coloured bricks and even black tarmac! At crossing points there are 'tactile' slabs with bobbles on, some white and some red. Unless one has very sensitive feet and thin shoes it is difficult to tell the difference between bobbles and cobbles.

A lot of modern ills can be blamed on the TV and the computer. I blame this jumble of road surfaces on the computer. With computer-aided design (CAD) the operator can, at the press of a key, change the road surface on the plan. There are many different surfaces to choose from. The designer seems to have behaved like an amateur printer with 100 fonts at his disposal. He used too many on one project and the result is less than elegant.

When the new by-pass removed some of the through traffic from the High Street an opportunity was lost. We now have something that looks like a cross between a postcard view of "Olde Englande" and a complicated board game with hazards at almost every move and unwritten rules.

Colin Garrett is a BCA Committee member.

Our Canal

One of Berkhamsted's great assets is our canal. It has been there for over 200 years now, but only in recent years has its real amenity value become to be realised. We who live in Berkhamsted and Northchurch perhaps take it rather for granted, but it is assuming an increasingly central role among the amenities of the town.

The Canalside Project to which Gordon Bluck refers - CARP - is intended to improve the canal and river corridor west of Lower Kings Road. The slowness in getting tangible results from this is regrettable, but much has happened in recent years along the cut.

In his column in the Oldie Magazine, Richard Mabey recently described the canal in Berkhamsted as a sort of linear village green for the variety of leisure uses to which it is put. A walk along the towpath on a warm Sunday evening confirms how much use is made of it and the adjoining areas of public land along the bottom of the valley.

Its character changes from the totally rural at the Bank Mill end, to the well used pleasure park type of area at Canal Fields, now much leafier than ever before. This is a popular family area, and next to it the children's playground is well equipped and maintained. The bowls, tennis and football clubs all overlook the canal here, but only a grass plot marks the spot where there was once our public outdoor swimming pool.

In the holiday season there seem to be more narrow boats than ever before, and there are lots of fishermen, ranging in age from 90 to five; and joggers, cyclists and dog-walkers.



Our linear Village Green?

The only pubs left in the town are either along the High Street or by the canal. The three remaining canalside hostelries - the Crystal Palace, the Boat and the Rising Sun - all to a greater or lesser extent exploit their canalside situation. A summer evening drink sitting beside the lock or in the pretty garden of the Rising Sun is one of the special pleasures that our town has to offer.

Chairman: Graham Spittle, 25 Harford Drive, Watford, WD1 3DQ

Membership Secretary: Christopher Talbot-Ponsonby, 38 Kitsbury Road, HP4 3EA

Citizen Editor: John Cook, 21 Castle Street, HP4 2DW

Tel: 01923 224744

Tel: 01442 865882

Tel: 01442 866278