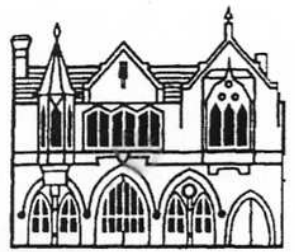


# THE CITIZEN

The Newsletter of the Berkhamsted Citizens Association



December 1998

## Profile



Rita Jones

Rita Jones is a stalwart on the BCA Committee and a member of the Activities Sub-Committee. Observant members who attend our meetings and outings will recognise Rita from her photograph as one of those who quietly organise events while the rest of us are enjoy ourselves.

14 years ago she realised it was possible to have the advantages of the country while working in London, and moved to Berkhamsted. She says these benefits outweigh even the best efforts of British Rail and now Silver Link County, and also she takes the opportunity to take advantage of much-enjoyed music, ballet, opera and arts provided by the city.

With experience in both retail and hospital pharmacy (Rita is a qualified pharmacist) she decided that what she really enjoyed was solving problems and providing information in the area of hospital pharmacy, so she has worked in that area ever since, obtaining a post graduate degree in information science.

Last year she retired from full-time work running the drug information service at Middlesex Hospital. She is now getting used to the flexibility of having the good fortune to choose when and where she works. The town and countryside are an increasing joy to her now, and she feels it vital for Berkhamsted to remain a small market town and not become a suburb of Greater London. Rita's hope is that the pleasure of looking out to the trees across the valley when walking down Swing Gate Lane, and the feeling of really being in the country when on the journey from London the streetlights stop for the first time outside Bourne End, will never fade.



View towards the common

## Forthcoming Events

BCA members should receive an invitation with this newsletter to the Association's Christmas Celebration. As usual we will have mulled wine and mince pies. The entertainment will be music and carols led by Graham Spittle's choir from Langleybury with, of course, audience participation.



The date for this event is Saturday, 12 December, at 8.00pm, and please note that this year it is being held in the more intimate venue of the COURT HOUSE. The Committee hopes that as many members as possible will come to our principal social event of the year.



The Court House: this year's venue

**BERKHAMSTED'S "FESTIVAL OF LIGHT"** will be held this year on Friday, 4 December.



The High Street will be closed to traffic from 4.30pm to 7.00pm to allow the festivities to take place, and the lights will be switched on by the Town Mayor at 6.00pm. BCA has now agreed to present a cup annually at the Festival to the shop with the best dressed window along the central part of the High Street and Lower Kings Road. The cup has been bought and will be inscribed each year with the winner's name.



Our new cup

**On 1 January, THE NEWS YEAR'S DAY WALK** will be to Aldbury across the Common and Ashridge Park, starting from the Railway Station at 10.30am. Our September ramble was almost literally a washout, so we do hope that this one will be much better attended. It is a traditional event of the Association and it will take perhaps the loveliest walk from Berkhamsted, across the Common and Ashridge Park, with a good chance of seeing deer and other wildlife.



**Our first talk of the New Year will be on 25 February** given by **Graham Spittle**, the previous Chairman of the Association and a solicitor with his own practice in the High Street. Graham is of course well known to many of us, with his impish sense of humour. He has called his talk "THE LIGHTER SIDE OF THE LAW." As usual, the talk will be in the **Great Hall of Berkhamsted Town Hall at 8.00pm.**



Our **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING** will be held on **25 March**, also in the **Town Hall at 8.00pm.**

We like to keep the formalities to a minimum, but that is in no way to discourage members from having their say or putting themselves up for election. It would be excellent if there were one of two new nominees put forward for the Committee.

The formal business will be followed by the **BCA's ANNUAL ENVIRONMENT AWARD**. The status of this award has greatly grown over the years. The choice made by the judges may not always be uncontroversial but candidates are carefully considered and weighed, and David Brunt's masterly presentation of them with slides is always well worth coming to see. (Please see his short article about the Awards on page 3).



### Other dates for your next year's diaries are:

**29 April. "Gardens in a Natural Style"** An illustrated talk by Francesca Greenoak, the gardening writer and well-known authority on the subject.

**19 June. Summer Event - A special one in 1999 to celebrate 75 years of the Association. Details to be announced (Members only).**

## Halton House: Another Opportunity

Those who went on the Sunday afternoon visit to Alfred de Rothschild's mansion at Halton, arranged by the Association in late October, were glad they did (particularly if they had been at the very informative talk by Wendy Austin on the Rothschilds a week or two earlier). Although stripped of its contents, furniture and pictures, and used as an RAF officers mess, the house is still very impressive with its decor largely intact; in fact much of it has been expertly restored.



*Members in Rothschild opulence at Halton*

We saw the very grand reception rooms and bedroom suites with magnificent views of the Chilterns and the Vale of Aylesbury, and we were shown the servants quarters in the basement and attics with no views at all. It was a thoroughly enjoyable visit, thanks largely to the warm welcome and excellent guiding of Squadron Leader John Walton. He would be happy to take another party from the Association round again next year, so if any members are interested would they let Rita Jones (872757) know.



*The Rothschilds' insignia on the stairs*

## Town Amenities Up-date

### Gordon Bluck reports:

In my last report I showed some frustration at the apparent lack of progress in the phased implementation of the Canalside Project, and I have to say that due to my ignorance I had not realised the problems involved in spending public money. Peter Such has quite rightly put the record straight as CARP Chairman and outlined to us the problems involved. It is excellent news that Ron Smith has been appointed to project manage the situation, and as an ex-bank manager he should be well placed to get things moving. (Not that I am biased, being a serving bank manager).

The plans for the AgrEvo site have occupied a great deal of our time as it is an important development in the area. The last thing we or the Borough Council want is another



*CARP should improve our canal even more*

'executive ghetto' with five bedroom, three garage houses in the range £400,000 - £500,000. The design brief prepared by the Council in conjunction with other interested parties was specific that affordable housing was to be included. The brief includes about 25% in this band. To keep costs down the developers have taken adaptations of "off the shelf designs" used in other locations, and although these may be acceptable in the middle of the site they are not on the canalside or the High Street. We objected to the very poor treatment on the Grand Union and also to the fact that some of the properties on the High Street had turned their backs with a wall and back gardens facing the important entrance to the town. As you may know from the press our Town Council has independently objected, especially to the canalside treatment. Fresh plans are in and are much better. We are in the process of assessing the alterations.



*The AgrEvo site: scheduled for demolition*

The improvements to the ex Castle pub which we reported were underway in the September Citizen have now been completed to a very high standard. WELL DONE to all concerned.

The Footpath Sub-Committee continues to pursue the possibilities of a new Footways map. The progress to date is that unfortunately due to constraints on their budget Dacorum Borough Council Community and Leisure Department are unable to join a joint venture with us; but the good news is that they will advise us on the distribution and will possibly stock it in their own tourist outlets. Another agency (which I shall keep under wraps at present) is looking at getting funds which would bring down the price. It is not the aim of the Association to

make a profit from this joint venture but to promote walking in the Dacorum area. The map will be re-drawn by a semi-retired map-maker and will have a lot more information on, possibly pubs walkers could visit. We hope it will be stocked in local shops and the railway station.

We have been contacted via the Town Council by Dacorum Film Project who are compiling a list of interesting buildings in the town, and indeed across Dacorum, with a view to a data base being available to the film industry. We have passed on some locations, but if any members wish to put their property forward they should contact Niki Munnery on 01442 261444. I presume you get paid if a film company wants to use your property.

*Gordon Bluck is Chairman of the Town Amenities Sub - Committee.*

**THE ENVIRONMENT AWARD 1998 :**

**THE FIRST STEP** *David Brunt writes:*

As the end of the calendar year approaches thoughts turn to potential candidates for the Environment Award. To qualify for entry the building, refurbishment, extension, edifice or whatever needs to have been substantially completed before the year end.

One of the aims of the award scheme is to raise awareness of what has been constructed or improved in the town, so if you know of any likely items please pass them on to a member of the Committee. In the middle of January the entries are considered by the Town Amenities Sub-Committee and a formal list of nominations established. Some entries fall at this first hurdle, but it is normal for 70% to 80% to become nominations.

All nominations are described in outline and illustrated during the slide show presentation at our AGM. Please be on the look-out during the next two months, and if you are in doubt concerning the quality of a possible entry, err on the generous side and put it forward.

*David Brunt has for many years been the principal co-ordinator of the Environment Award.*



*A last year's entry for the environment award*

# Berkhamsted Town Hall:

## *The next exciting step*

Giles Clark reports:

The New Year will be momentous for our Town Hall - at last the Market House facing the High Street will be fully restored and the large front room on the first floor, derelict since the 1970's, re-opened to the public.

The Town Hall Trust has had this ambition since it took over the threatened building in 1981. The restoration of the whole of the Town Hall complex has been lengthy and arduous. At first floor level the Trust first restored and re-opened the Sessions Hall, then in 1992 the Great Hall. The Trust has raised more than £900,000 in the restoration thus far. Now the last historic space awaits.

The new Market House was built in 1859. On the ground floor a Market Hall was constructed for trade, the income from which sustained the community halls. Upstairs a reading room for the Mechanics' Institute was incorporated. The Institute endured for 100 years.



*The front room of the Town Hall:  
to be completely restored*

The forthcoming restoration of the front room, capacity about 100 people, will provide a magical setting for community and social events (including weddings) and for artistic occasions. A chair-lift for the disabled will be included; and adjoining new lavatories and a cloakroom will be built to serve both the front room and the Great Hall behind. Last year 30,000 people used the Town Hall. The opening of this further historic room should increase attendance by a third.

Apart from further improvements to the interior, the next phase of the building works includes completing the restoration of the front to the High Street and some roofing improvements. The great news is that the Heritage Lottery Board has granted the Trust £225,000 for the building work and the Trust has secured partnership funding of £88,000. But the Heritage Board was not able to contribute towards the £50,000 we asked for towards works such as the cloakroom, display cases to house the town's artefacts, and a dry bar. Furthermore, the Trust and the Friends of the Town Hall always knew that they would have to raise funds for the loose fittings (chairs, tables, curtains etc.) which were not eligible for Lottery funding.

Hence the Friends and the Trust will shortly be launching an appeal for £48,000 for the very things people will actually see and use. If you are interested in helping this great conservation and community project please contact the Friends' Chairman Giles Clark (Tel: work 01908-653515; home 01442 865158) or the Trust's Chairman Ken Sherwood (01442 865158).

The Town Hall belongs to us - the people of Berkhamsted and Northchurch. Please help in any way you can to see its remarkable restoration completed.

*Giles Clark was BCA Chairman in 1993/4. He is a Trustee of Berkhamsted Town Hall and Chairman of the Friends of The Town Hall.*

## A NEW LOCAL PLAN

Dacorum Borough Council has just published the latest draft of its Local Plan (1991-2011) for consultation. A copy can be inspected in Berkhamsted Civic Centre, and if you wish to comment you have until 15 January 1999 to do so. By the time this edition of the Citizen is out the one planned exhibition in Berkhamsted will already have taken place (on 16 November); but another is scheduled to be held in Northchurch Social Centre on Friday 11 December, between 10.00am and 9.00pm.

To a large extent the document consolidates the position that the Council has taken over recent years. The plan is too complicated to summarise here (there are three volumes of it in difficult-to-read sans serif font, plus six maps). Much of it is in planners' jargon, but it may be of interest to mention here some of the points which particularly concern the people of Berkhamsted and Northchurch.

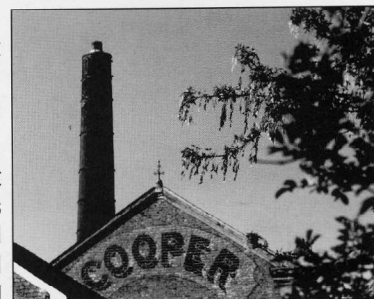


*Bank Mill Lane. Houses could be built here in the Green Belt.*

For example, it maps out the main areas proposed to be developed for housing here. They are the Stag Lane site (120 units), the AgrEvo site to the east of Holliday Street (90) and four in the Green belt: Bank Mill Lane (40); Berkhamsted Hill (the old Wellcome Experimental Station) (160), Egerton Rothsay School grounds in Durrants Lane (100) and land between the canal and railway at Northchurch (50).

Another major housing development site on Green Belt land - one of 550 units - is planned between Hemel Hempstead and Potten End. It is interesting to note that the people who will live in the development there will be just about as close to Berkhamsted as to Hemel Hempstead to do their shopping etc.

The plan defines two important studies for Berkhamsted. As most of the town is designated an area of archeological significance an archeological survey is to be carried out. The documents make particular reference to industrial archaeology, much of which has been lost even in quite recent times. The other study commissioned by the Council is of parking demand in Berkhamsted, with the aim of producing a parking management study for the town.



If BCA members wish to make comments on the plan they may of course do so direct to the Council, or they may if they like let the Committee have their views so that these may be taken into account in the response which it will be making on behalf of the Association.



*Parking to be managed?*

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