

THE CITIZEN

The Newsletter of the Berkhamsted Citizens Association



December 1999

Profile



Hilary Talbot-Ponsonby

Chairman of Berkhamsted Citizens Association, member of the old Urban District Council, school governor, founder member of Berkhamsted Town Hall Trust - these are some of the roles in which Hilary has served the community of Berkhamsted and Northchurch over many years.

She joined the BCA Committee in 1972, was chairman in 1976 and 1977 and membership secretary from 1979 to 1981, the job which her son Christopher now does. Her late husband Evelyn was chairman before her.

A qualified architect, Hilary has for many years been particularly helpful in vetting and commenting on planning applications - and still does as a member of our Amenities Sub-Committee.

Among her other interests are the National Council of Women of Great Britain where she is on the Transport Permanent Working Party with special interest in Railways and Bicycles. She is President of the Northchurch Derby and Joan Club.

Hilary has been honoured for her services to the town by being made a patron of the Town Hall Trust and a life member of the BCA.



Morris Men at Aldbury: New Year's Day, 1999



Frithsden Beeches, on our route to Aldbury

Forthcoming Events



The BCA Christmas Celebration

This will be held at 8pm in the Great Hall of the Town Hall on **Friday, 10 December**. There will be mulled wine and minced pies, and this year for our entertainment and to lead us in the carol singing we will have the Ashlyns School Choir. As usual the event will only be open to members and distinguished guests. Entrance at the door £3.50.

New Year's Day Walk, 2000

Despite the festivities the night before we will still be having the traditional **New Year's Day ramble to Aldbury**, starting from Berkhamsted Station forecourt at 10.30am. We had a good turnout for the event on 1 January this year, and the Morris men were dancing to welcome us as we arrived in Aldbury. Some people may wish to arrange to be picked up at Aldbury to make the return journey by car; others, after refreshments at the Greyhound or the Valiant Trooper, may choose to take the walk back. This could be just what the doctor ordered after the ordeal of seeing out 1999.



The Wild Life of Ashridge

We are so fortunate to have Berkhamsted Common and Ashridge Park close at hand, with free access over most of 4,000 acres of lovely countryside and a chance to see the very varied wildlife. Much of this land is of course owned by the



Fallow Deer in Ashridge Park

National Trust, and we are very pleased to have been able to arrange for Don Otter of the Trust to come and give us an illustrated talk on the subject of **The Wild Life of Ashridge**. This will be in the Great Hall of the Town Hall on **Thursday, 17 February at 8pm**

AGM - advance notice

Our Annual General Meeting in the year 2000 will be held in the Town Hall on **Thursday 23 March at 8pm**

The Festival of Light

Once again this year Berkhamsted High Street is being closed between 4 and 8pm for Christmas festivities and the switching on of the lights, these days called the Festival of Light. This will take place



as early as **Friday, 3 December**, so look out for the posters giving details. There will be stalls, side shows, choirs and bands, as well as the presentation of the cup for the best-dressed shop window. The cup, given by the BCA, will be awarded by us to the shop which, in our judgement, has the best dressed window, decorated in a way that reflects in

some measure the theme 'The Spirit of the Millennium'.



The Environment Award, 1999

Committee member David Brunt writes:

It is at this time of the year that we start to consider what physical changes have taken place within the parish boundaries of Berkhamsted and Northchurch and which of those substantially completed by 31st December this year are worthy of nomination for an award. All members of the Association may put recommendations forward, and the Committee welcomes and appreciates hearing of potential entries. As usual after the formal business of the AGM there will be a slide presentation of the short-listed entries.



Caffè Uno was given a commendation for 1998.

Just a brief reminder of the key criteria. An entry doesn't have to be a building and it doesn't have to be large (The winner for 1997 was the weather vane on a church spire). What is important is that the entry reflects good design and quality of construction, fits well into its environment and provides a measure of benefit to the community, albeit a visual one if, say, the entry is a private house or a house extension. The judges for the award scheme are your Town Amenities Sub-Committee and their recommendations are put to the main committee for ratification

Most years since the award scheme was introduced the winner has been presented with a handsome pottery plaque bearing the Association's insignia. On some occasions the judges felt that no entry was up to the necessary standard and so no plaque was awarded.



One of our handsome plaques

However, Certificates of Commendation are also awarded, and there hasn't yet been a year when nothing at all was worthy of either of these two recognitions of achievement. One reason behind the scheme is to raise general awareness of what has been created each year. To that end please look around you to identify what has been achieved, and pass on to a Committee member anything you consider falls into the nomination category.

Town Amenities

Gordon Bluck, Chairman of the Amenities Sub-Committee, reports:

The last three months have seen great changes. Beginning in the town: with the start of the building work on Incent's Lawn and also at the old Prep School site in Chesham Road; chaos for the residents, but I suppose over in one big hit. The development at 'Castle Quay' has started on the first of the old Cooper's/Wellcome sites with, I understand, a great deal of interest from potential buyers, and I hope new residents to the town. On a personal note, the prices that properties both old and new are fetching are a great concern as "executive ghettos" spring up. I hope not too many turn out to be "off at 06.27 and back on the 19.24" commuters (as I am one of those).



The demolition at 'Castle Quay' has opened up new vistas.

The major development that our Committee has considered is the Ravens Lane/Manor Street site (Wellcome/Coopers Site 3 - the proposed retirement village near the golf club being the other) and this has turned out to be rather a nest of vipers. Proposed is demolition and making safe, in view of the contamination, then trying to replicate the street scene with an admittedly inward-facing development of 65 flats with 100 car parking spaces and 120 cycle places.

Local residents have formed a group-CARAB-under the excellent chairmanship of Simon Haywood which questioned, quite rightly, the contamination report commissioned by Glaxo/Wellcome to back up the alarming application to demolish and rebuild.

As you may have seen in the local paper they believe there are better alternatives to total demolition and have mounted a campaign to that effect. We as a Sub-Committee have spent much time looking at the plans and reading the reports and submissions. After much deliberation we decided, with regret, not to oppose demolition as we feel the problem of the undoubted contamination will not go away. The extent of it is open to debate but we feel we are unqualified to argue with the



An old cast iron lamp bracket on a threatened building in Ravens Lane

experts who are putting their professional reputation on the line. As we go to press the current position is that the Development Control Committee has deferred a decision on the matter. The plans to redevelop the site are in our view a good first try. With some modification to the roofs in Ravens Lane and the use of best quality materials they could be made acceptable.

Turning to other planning matters, as I write our concern about the recently painted No 262 High Street - what was The Highwayman, now to be Magoo's - highlights the lack of control that can be currently imposed on what is done within the conservation area. If we could manage to get what is known as an Article 4 Direction (Planning Document PPG 15) tighter control could be enforced over the painting of buildings in inappropriate colours within the core of the town. We are therefore proposing that, for a start at least, the central part of the High Street should be covered by an Article 4 Direction. If members agree please contact me and we can form a group to take matters forward.



The central part of the High Street. Could further conservation measures be taken?

The next phase of the Canal and River Project (CARP) includes improving the towpath.

All the time in our town things are happening, and although I do not want to be NIMBY (not in my back yard) we should try to get the best for the future. I encourage members to contact me on matters of concern on 873548 or write to 22 Bridgewater Road.



Europe and Berkhamsted

In June our new European MPs were elected, and we have been asked to include a list of them in the Newsletter. There are no less than eight: Christopher Beasley, Andrew Duff, Richard Howitt, Bashir Khanbhai, (Ms) Eryl McNally, Robert Sturdy, Jeffrey Titford and Geoffrey Van Orden. They all represent the Eastern Constituency and cover the counties of Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk and Suffolk. Any correspondence should be sent to 2 Queen Anne's Gate, London, SW1H 9AA.

You may have been surprised to see that Berkhamsted with the rest of Hertfordshire is now, in Government and EU thinking, part of the Eastern Region. This is not just a political region; it is an economic one as well. A board of directors has already been set up for the region, with the task of producing a regional economic development policy.

Berkhamsted is on the extreme western edge of it. Just up Chesham Road you cross not only into Bucks but into a different economic region which in the course of time could have quite different economic policies than those which will apply to us. The latest editions of the Ordnance Survey maps show these European constituency boundaries, giving them the brand of permanence. Now we are linked, in the bureaucratic system, with Bury St Edmonds and the East Coast ports like Felixstowe rather than Aylesbury and Amersham.

It will be interesting over the next few years to see what practical effect all this will have, if any.



Our Own Sewage Works

Just off Bulbeggars Lane is Berkhamsted's Sewage Treatment Works, and the BCA visit there proved to be absorbingly interesting to those members who braved the rain on a very wet Sunday in late October.

While our water comes from Three Rivers Water Company, our Sewage goes to Thames Water. The town's sewage works, and it is truly ours in the sense that it deals exclusively with Berkhamsted and Northchurch sewage (only the best), is a few years old now and cost Thames Water £4.5m. to build. It functions on a quite different system from most other works. It can treat 260 litres of raw sewage a second, sufficient for the present population of 21,000 (I am not sure how they arrived at that figure) and up to 23,000 if the population expands. 99% of the sewage is water. There are storage tanks to hold excess quantities which might arrive at times of peak flow. After various filtration processes the treated sewage - then quite wholesome - discharges into the canal.



The road off Bulbeggars Lane to Berkhamsted's Sewage Works

The system operates automatically. There are occasional lorry movements in and out, but most of the time there is nobody there at the works, apart from the snails. Every sewage works has its particular problems and at ours there are fresh-water snails. They have got into the filter system and eat up the bio-slime that has been put there to act as the filter. Another problem is foam. The treated sewage has to be given a foam-suppressing dose of a chemical which rather takes the sparkle out of it.

Anyway, nothing for us to worry about: we can leave these little difficulties in the hands of Thames Water's experts like Anna Hopwood and Steve Warburton, the two managers who were kind enough to give up their Sunday morning to take us on such an informative conducted tour.



The freshwater snail has its teeth (?) into our bio-slime.

Footnote on Mink

In the last issue of *The Citizen* the question was posed as to whether there were still any mink running wild in or around Berkhamsted. Eric Hoey reports that he has seen two - a brown one and a grey one - and Julie Penfold rang up to say she had a really good sighting of one early one morning in September.

Chairmen's Dinner

It has been the practice from time to time over the years for past chairmen of the Association to get together for an informal dinner. Since it was our 75th anniversary this year the Committee decided to revive the practice. Past chairmen, present Committee members and life members were invited with their spouses and there was a very good response.



Chairmen, Committee members and spouses at the dinner

40 people came with a total of some 200 years service to the BCA between them; the present Committee alone has clocked up 147 years. It was a convivial evening in the Court House. Catering was by Sally Clark's Food for Thought; Keith Gay, a past chairman, proposed the toast to the Association and the current chairman responded. To allay any possible misgivings of members: those attending had to pay for the privilege; in fact a small profit was made and has gone into BCA funds.



Venue of the chairmen's dinner. The restoration of the Court House won a BCA plaque in 1983.

The Late Nancy Rhind

It is sad to record that two months before the dinner our oldest past chairman died. Nancy Rhind was 94³/₄ years old (she liked to be precise in this) and was Chairman back in 1952/3. One of her achievements - before she was Chairman - was to put a great deal of mileage into checking out footpaths by walking them, at the time when the first Citizens' footpath map was being prepared. Another, after she became Chairman, was at a formal ceremony, to present to the Urban District Council the town sign which the Association gave to the town and which still stands outside the Civic Centre.

She kept up her interest in Berkhamsted even during the time when she was living in Potten End, and Holy Trinity Church there was full for her funeral. The Association sends its condolences to Nancy's son Robert and daughter Priscilla Watt.



The town sign, donated by BCA in 1983

Making the BCA Known

Susan Johnson, Vice-Chairman writes:

Your Committee would like to spread the word to a greater number of residents about the work the Association does in the town and the advantages of membership. The Association's 75th anniversary has given the impetus to try to raise our profile and membership numbers during 2000.

All current members are each being asked to try to recruit another, so that more people can join in our activities and an increase in our numbers can boost our influence in the town over things which matter to us all. Extra newsletters are being distributed with the current batch which we hope you can circulate to your friends and neighbours.

This will be the first of a number of profile-raising strategies throughout 2000. I have been asked to lead a small team in formulating ideas and carrying them out.

We've got some things planned already, but if you have any ideas which you think could help us please give me a ring or write. All contributions will be valued. Thanks for your help.

Note from the Editor

Next year I will have completed five years as editor of this newsletter. That, I think, is quite long enough. I took it on from Eric Hoey, an excellent editor, and the year 2000 will be a good time for a new hand (or rather pen) to take over and bring a fresh look and perhaps a new slant to it. If any members feel they would like to be involved in the production of the newsletter, which is our main means of communication with the membership, please get in touch with me or a member of the Committee.

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