

# THE CITIZEN

The Newsletter of the Berkhamsted Citizens Association



September 1999

## Profile



*Paul Gilbert*

Paul has been a member of the BCA Committee for the past six years and our representative on the Canal and Riverside Partnership (CARP) for three of them. He is on the Town Amenities Sub-Committee and is especially anxious to help prevent this historic town from being spoilt yet further by what he sees as too much over-development.

After the war years in Bournemouth he completed his education at Pitmans College in London. Following National Service at General Eisenhower's Headquarters in Paris (SHAPE), nearly all his working life was spent in the philatelic trade, specialising in New Issues.

Paul took early retirement in 1996 and since then has been active in local voluntary work. His leisure activities include reading (especially Graham Greene!), home-made winemaking, swimming and, more recently, outdoor bowling.

He and his wife Sally are members of the Northwood & Pinner Liberal Synagogue. They have three daughters living in Derbyshire and Adelaide, South Australia, and four grandchildren.



*An innovation: The Friday antiques & collectables market in the High Street*

## Events

### Berkhamsted: An Illustrated History

First, a reminder of the meeting reported in the June issue of *The Citizen*. **On Wednesday, 20 October, at 8 pm** there will be a joint meeting with the Local History Society at which Scott Hastie will give an illustrated talk on his book *Berkhamsted – An Illustrated History*. David Spain will also be there to explain the techniques he used to produce its excellent illustrations using archive photographs.



*In the book: a photograph from the 1890's - Sills' Timber Yard*

This will be our first meeting in the newly restored Clock Room in the Town Hall. Entrance as usual will be free to members of the Association and to those of the History Society.

### 'The Great Stink of London'

**On Thursday, 18 November**, Dr Stephen Halliday – a long-term resident of Berkhamsted - will give an illustrated talk to the Association on the subject of his recently published book *The Great Stink of London – Sir Joseph Bazalgette and the Cleansing of the Victorian Metropolis*.



*Bazalgette*

Stephen's book has been well reviewed in the national press and nominated for the Wolfson history-book prize. Its subject is a great 19th century engineer and his projects that allowed London to develop in the way it did – not just the provision of a massive drainage system but the building of the Thames embankments and other major works. This promises to be a particularly interesting presentation by a professional lecturer. 8pm in the Town Hall

## Visit to our sewage works

Prior to Stephen's talk the Association is arranging a visit to Berkhamsted sewage treatment works. This will be at 10.30am on Sunday, 24 October 1999. We meet at the gate of the works. Take the first turn to the right in Bullbeggars Lane (between the canal bridge and the railway bridge) and go on to the end of the lane.

## Walk on the Common

A number of members have been concerned at what is happening on the Common, particularly to the trees. To help us understand what is going on there, Andy Hardstaff of Countryside Management Services has agreed to give an explanation and lead a walk of BCA members on Sunday, 26 September. We meet at the railway station at 10.30am. (Please see Gordon Bluck's comments below).



*The Common*

## Christmas Event

Please make an advance note of the date of our Christmas event: Friday 10 December, in the Town Hall at 8pm. More details in the next issue of *The Citizen*.

We are sorry to say goodbye to Ian McCalla. Ian is a great walker and many members of the Association will remember his leading some of our rambles – in fair weather and foul. Ian retired some years ago and now following the retirement of his wife Valerie they have gone to live in another good centre for walking - Shropshire.

## Town Amenities

*The Sub-Committee Chairman, Gordon Bluck, writes:*

### Fieldpath map

The Fieldpath map is now basically redrawn by our mapmaker Bill Willett, and he is currently walking some of the paths to check them out. I understand he has a suntan an Australian lifeguard would be proud of. As I write this report our working party is due to see the results so far and I am as excited as a 47 year-old bank manager can get. Since my last report Berkhamsted Town Council has received £1500 from the Herts County Council footpaths scheme, and this will be paid over to us when costs are incurred. This is £500 more than asked for because not enough parishes applied for funds, so there was a 'divvy'. I would have asked for £1500 in the first place but I was told that £1000 was the maximum we would get.

## Planning

It was with pride that we offered our congratulations to Christopher Talbot-Ponsonby, not only on his election as Town Councillor but also as Vice-Chairman of the Town Planning Committee. Although he is our Membership Secretary and of course a member of the Main Committee, he will now also serve the town with his long and expert knowledge.

As we come to up to the summer break we are expecting the usual flood of planning applications when Dacorum's hard pressed planners are taking a break. On planning matters the proposal to build above 112/118 High Street seems to overshadow the nearby buildings in Castle Street and we objected.



*Cooper's buildings in Ravens Lane*

Regarding the highly controversial proposal to demolish the Cooper's buildings at Ravens Lane/Manor Street we believe that a scheme for redevelopment should be agreed before permission is given to demolish the apparently contaminated buildings. Experts abound and it is difficult for the layman/woman like myself to know what to believe.

There has been a new scheme for the Rex, but we have objected on the basis that the loss of some of the Art Deco features and five retail units (one of which is functioning) is unacceptable.

We have given Dacorum Planning Department a list of obvious planning breaches like the 'secure parking' sign in the High Street opposite St Peter's Church, and they will try and enforce removal.

## The Canal and Riverside Project

The first results of the CARP project are on public show at Castle Street canal bridge and the now that 'snagging' has been completed they look good. With the changes in the Town Council the Committee has changed and some original members of CARP are back in charge.



*The CARP works, phase 1*

Good work was done by the outgoing team and their replacements will continue to strive to improve the canal and riverside.

## Trees

We have received most helpful letters from both Andy Hardstaff of Countryside Management Services and the General Manager of Berkhamsted Golf Club explaining the felling of trees on the golf course. If any members want a copy please let me know on 873548. (Please see the notice under Events about a walk to be conducted by Andy on 26 September).

*On a completely different matter I have been approached to ask if there is a member who can accept the post of co-ordinating fund-raiser for Ashlyns School on a non-fee basis. Please phone me on 873548 if you might be interested.*

## The Graham Greene Birthplace Trust

**Susan Johnson, our Vice-Chairman, is BCA's nominee on the Graham Greene Birthplace Trust. She writes:**

The second GRAHAM GREENE FESTIVAL will see the gathering of a whole host of distinguished and indeed famous faces in Berkhamsted: Jill Paton Walsh, John Barry, Bryan Forbes, Roy Boulting – the list is impressive. The theme is Greene's Catholicism, but the tone will not be reverential (the last thing GG would have wanted!), the emphasis being on enjoyment, debate and the interpretation of Greene's work in diverse media.



*Graham Greene's birthplace: St John's, Chesham Road*

'Brighton Rock' is this year's key book and the trip to Brighton planned for Thursday, 30 September to view the places in the novel is a new and exciting departure. 'Brighton Rock' (the film), with Richard Attenborough's incomparable performance, will be screened and the following days will feature events on Greene archives, friends, the making of the film, the tradition of the English 'Catholic Novel', adaptations for the stage and for musical theatre.

Brochures and booking forms are available from various locations in and around Berkhamsted (look for the posters and exhibitions). Tickets are available from the Festival Office c/o the Town Hall or (from 6 September) from the library in Kings Road. A season ticket which is an innovation this year is available at a reduced price if purchased in August.

I look forward to seeing a goodly number of BCA members at these events. The Festival runs from 30 September to 3 October 1999.

## Skyline

The removal of the scaffolding from the front of the Town Hall has revealed that another bit of Berkhamsted's skyline has been restored. A missing finial from Edward Buckton



*The Town Hall's restored skyline*

Lamb's original design has now been replaced, completing the restoration of the facade. It is not quite as Lamb originally intended it to be: the gable with the clock on it was a later addition.

The Victorians took a lot of trouble with the skylines of their buildings, and there are still a number of attractive features that adorn our town to be admired if we look up for them. From before the last century the church towers of St Mary's, Northchurch, and St Peter's have survived, but all the other worthwhile features of the town's skyline are from Victoria's reign or a bit later.



*Berkhamsted Collegiate School buildings in Castle Street*

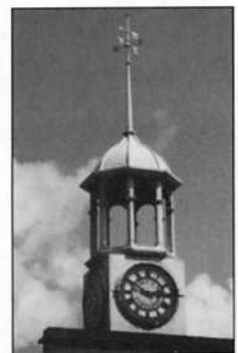
There is the recently refurbished spire of Berkhamsted Baptist Church; and then the Berkhamsted Collegiate School buildings have several: the small spire on the chapel and ventilator lanterns on the building next to it, as well as big ornamented chimney stacks on the Old School.



*The feature on the old Bourne School*

This is a really pretty feature in a prominent central position, and with a bit of luck will soon be restored and up and working again, thanks to the efforts of the Town Council. Then there are many other smaller ones, such as the terra cotta figures on the roof of Sibden Place terrace, opposite the Rex.

The old Bourne School building, now the Britannia Building Society, has another nice little lantern, and just along the High Street from there, on the building on the corner of Lower Kings Road, is what many people still call the De Lisle clock.



*The De Lisle clock*

Finally a question to test your knowledge of our skyline: where in Berkhamsted is this Dutch gable?





# The Late John Stobbs

*Norman Williams, a past BCA chairman, writes:*

With the death of John Stobbs in July the Association lost one of its one of its most valued members. A member of the Committee from 1960 to 1966 he was a wholehearted supporter of the objectives of the Association and, by reason of his many interests and exceptional knowledge of activities in the area, of particular value in determining policy.

After acquiring a sound academic background and service as a captain in the artillery during the war, he took up journalism. Golf was his principal interest, and apart from being a brilliant golfer himself he became a most influential member of Berkhamsted Golf Club. Over the years he sought to improve and extend the course while remaining a strong protector of its conservation aspects.

In journalism he was the golf correspondent of The Observer and also wrote a number of books on the subject. In later years he was the Tring correspondent for The Gazette. He was a person of many accomplishments, being a keen gardener, a poet and one who retained a close interest in local affairs. Those present at the Service of Remembrance at All Saints' Church, Marsworth, were reminded of his sensitive and most attractive character when four of his poems were read, particularly that of 14 November 1945 in which he described his feeling on returning to Berkhamsted after his own war service.

The Association extends to his wife Anne and his three daughters our sympathy over their sad loss.

## Our Birthday Party

It was gratifying to see so many BCA members at the Association's 75th Anniversary Garden Party in June, despite the overcast day. Giles Clarke had put his splendid garden into tiptop shape for the event, and we are most grateful for his hospitality. There was a piano quartet, strawberries and cream, Pimm's, and a big birthday cake – in fact two.

Among the guests were John Brooks, the Town Mayor, with the Mayoress, and the Chief Executive of the Borough, Keith Hunt and his wife. It was a very successful occasion, not least due to the planning and hard work put in by the Events Sub-Committee, with Gill Feil leading from the front.



*Cutting our 75th birthday cake*

## Ducks and Predators

What happens to all the ducklings which are born, in ever increasing numbers it seems, every year in the town? Among the many places where they successfully raised broods was my little

walled back yard. In July a duck hatched twelve ducklings despite the cat, and I succeeded in marshalling the lot of them down to the Bulbourne; but where are they all now?

Perhaps it is just as well that there are plenty of predators – on land, in the water and in the air – otherwise we would be inundated with ducks. When I walk to the station to get the morning paper there is often a heron, sometimes two, waiting their chance. Occasionally a great black-backed gull will be there too, looking for an opportunity to swoop.



*Heron and Black-backed Gull*



Foxes and badgers are seen prowling after dark, and lurking below the surface of the canal are the pike. A few years ago a mink was also reported, but I haven't heard of that for a while.



*Fox and Badger*



Anyway, despite all this predation plenty of ducks manage to survive on the canal, as we can all see.



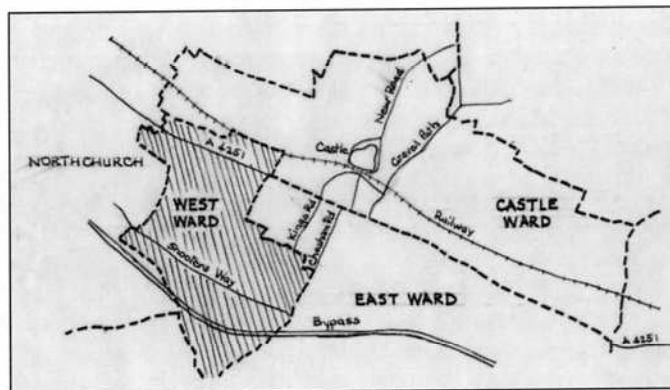
*Mink and Pike*



## Constituency changes

The Local Government Commission for England has proposed alterations to the boundaries of County Council electoral divisions which in the view of the BCA Committee would adversely affect Berkhamsted and Northchurch.

At present Berkhamsted forms a single division with one county councillor. The Commission's proposal is to transfer Berkhamsted West Ward to the Bridgewater Division, adding it to Northchurch, Ashridge and Watling Wards. The intention, it is claimed, would be to make the numbers of electors in the Berkhamsted and Bridgewater Divisions more equal; in fact the effect would be to throw the balance out in the opposite direction almost to the same extent. Furthermore, in our view it would not be in the interest of Berkhamsted or of Northchurch and the rural communities which comprise the present Bridgewater Division if this change were to be made. We have therefore registered our objection to the proposal, as has the Town Council.



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