

THE CITIZEN

The Newsletter of the Berkhamsted Citizens Association



October 2000

Profile:



Bill Willett

Bill was born and brought up in Cannock Chase, descended from several generations of coal miners and farmers. He was educated at King Edward VI Grammar School in Lichfield and then Manchester University where he graduated in geography. After National Service in the Army he returned to Manchester to study for a research degree, the topic being the change in Manchester's population between 1750 and 1850. Leaving the university he joined the cartographic publishers, George Philip, where he worked nearly 40 years, retiring as their cartographic editor, a post previously held by another Berkhamsted resident, Harold Fullard.

At Philips he specialised in the production of world reference and school atlases and maps for this country and many parts of the globe; all the English speaking countries, all the countries of western Europe and many others - Japan, Sri Lanka, Brazil and Colombia for example - in all about 60 countries and about 1000 different atlases and editions. As part of his job he enjoyed travelling to many of these countries.

Philips (or rather their sister company, Edward Stanford) produced the first editions of the BCA Footpath Map, so it is fitting that in his retirement it is Bill who has produced our new Footpath Map.

He and his wife Patricia have lived in Berkhamsted since 1962, and their son, daughter and grandchildren live in the area.

A Website of Our Very Own

Your committee is thinking of establishing a Berkhamsted Citizens Association website, but needs some assistance in doing so. Is there one of our members with expertise who would be prepared to help set the site up? We would be very grateful for any guidance and assistance. Expenses would be paid.

If you are able to help please get in touch with any member of the committee.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Our first meeting of the new season will be on Thursday, 12 October, when Ron Cowie will come to talk to us about Berkhamsted and District Chamber of Commerce. Since the Chamber was reformed some eight years ago Ron has been its chairman, and under his leadership its membership and influence has steadily grown. His talk promises to open interesting insights into the commercial state of our town and the prospects in the changing nature of businesses here.



Our second meeting will be on Thursday, 16 November when Chris Green will come to address us. Many members will remember when Chris, a BCA member, came to speak to us in his capacity of Chief Executive of English Heritage. As is widely known he has now returned to the railways (previously he had held several senior positions with British Rail, including Director of Network SouthEast), and is Chief Executive of Richard Branson's Virgin Trains. His talk should throw a lot of light on the future of our railway, especially the main line services which speed through Berkhamsted.



Both meetings will be in the Great Hall of the Town Hall, starting at 8pm. They are of course free to members. If you wish to bring a friend please do so: the charge for non-members is £2.

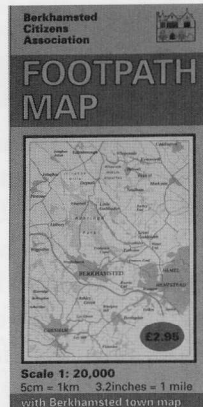
Please note in your diaries other future events which are listed on the card which you should have received with this newsletter. More details of them will be given in the next issue.

TOWN AMENITIES

Gordon Bluck, Chairman of the Sub – Committee, reports:

The biggest thing affecting this committee and I suspect the Association is the printing of our new Footpath Map. It is now on sale at the Bookstack, Complete Outdoors (Bourne End), the information centres at the Marlowes and Tring Market House, and various other shops in the area at £2.95.

In the past we have been in a situation where we had to sell the maps to recoup our cost, whereas on the Millennium revision the grant funding from Dacorum Borough Council, the Parish Paths Partnership and a gift from a member, David Palmer, ensured receipts from sales are held for future reprints. Bill Willett has done a wonderful job and put two years hard work into the task and I would like to say a personal thank you to him, Susan Johnson, John Cook and Colin Garrett for all their support. To date over 500 copies have been sold and I am negotiating for a local organisation to take an initial 1000 maps. We had a successful press launch with three mayors and a number of parish chairmen from the area covered. There was good coverage of the event in the Gazette, with a photograph. The only problem, as my twelve-year-old son pointed out, was my normal cheesy grin in the background. Oh dear.



The New Millennium Edition

Other items of note included a meeting four of the main committee had with an officer of Dacorum Borough toward formalising a ten-year vision for the town and borough and the part that the BCA wants to play in the change. Susan Johnson explains below a little more about this. It was an interesting exercise and I enjoyed it very much.

On the planning front the Ravens Lane/Manor Street development looks as though it is going ahead. As you will recall we have taken the line of trusting the experts in coming to a balanced result. We have been concerned over the parking on the wide pavement



Parking on the pavement outside the Fitness Centre.

outside the Fitness Centre in the High Street and some 4-wheel drive vehicles are already causing damage. It beats me why, if you are trying to get fit, you can't walk from the car park. There has been the suggestion that over 20 demountable plastic bollards would solve the problem, but what would they look like? – ghastly. We await developments.

A working group is being formed at the BCA's instigation with Councillor Ken Coleman and the Town Mayor Lindy Foster Weinreb from the Town Council and John Cook and David Brunt from the BCA, to look at appropriate buildings for listing in the town.



What ten-year vision should we have for our town?

Our Chairman, Susan Johnson, has several things to report:

Community Forums

Separated by two months and the length of the High Street, Dacorum Borough Council held two Community Forums (Fora in my day, and I'm not yet 50, to use the Vice-Chairman's mantra) at Westfield School, Durrants Lane and Swing Gate School. These were aimed at local residents (DBC had advertised the meetings by putting leaflets through all doors in the respective areas) and were designed to try to find out what locals thought about their area and Berkhamsted in general, with a view to targeting scarce resources most effectively.

I went along to the first at Durrants on behalf of the BCA and because I live there. Attendance was poor when it came to the locals. Most of us there were active in community work or organisations, and would have turned up wherever it had been held in Berkhamsted. The meeting took the form of a brainstorming session and resulted in us concluding that we lived in a great town surrounded by beautiful countryside whose few problems resulted largely from the fact that we were affluent, e.g. too many cars parked on narrow roads and too many aircraft overhead; or from current social mores and lack of local government funds. I ask myself whether this was a legitimate conclusion or whether this results from the initiated and "empowered" talking amongst themselves. Answers on a postcard.....

If you have any ideas how to persuade people to turn up to discuss matters which don't involve *complaining* about something, please get in touch with me or the Community Development Officers in the DBC Community & Leisure Dept.



Too many cars parked on narrow roads.

That Vision Thing

Some of your Committee participated in a recent DBC exercise to help prepare a "10 year vision for Dacorum". This involved us sitting down with a DBC officer as facilitator and discussing the history of our organisation, its activities today and what it would like to see for Dacorum (not just Berkhamsted) during the next ten years. This was part of the necessary response DBC must make to the DETR under the terms of the recent White Paper "Modern Local Government : In touch with the People" (sic); and was done up and down the Borough over the last few months. The result was some navel-gazing, but it did confirm for us some issues within this organisation which must be addressed if it is to remain vibrant and relevant to Berkhamstedians at large in a generation's time, for example, the age and economic profiles of our membership. If you would like a copy of the text, please get in touch.

The Rex

Since I wrote in the June Newsletter there has been a flurry of activity in planning terms and heated debate in the Gazette, particularly in the letters column. The Rex Film & Arts Centre Trust's application went through the refining fire which is the DBC Development Control Committee and came out with a B+ grade. Evidently, as I predicted, the problem is car parking in surrounding streets. The Trust has been asked to provide a traffic survey and the Committee will then reconsider the application.



The Rex from Three Close Lane. Scope for improvement!

The latest application from Nicholas King Homes, which this time does include a one-screen cinema, was similarly considered at the latest meeting and was "delegated with a view to approval" and subject to a 106 Agreement involving finding someone to run the cinema. No wringing of hands this time over car parking, despite most of the on-site parking having to go to potential residents of the flats to be built. The problem for NKH will be finding someone to run the cinema, which is widely regarded to be uneconomic as one-screen.

The most heartening aspect of all this is that the Trust seems to have established the principle with the DBC Councillors that the Rex should be preserved with at least some element of cinema in it. And that it should have most of its Art Deco features kept. We await with interest the next developments.

As for the letters in the Gazette, they seem to be entirely from those directly involved in the Trust, and those who consider any form of entertainment which involves social activity outside the home after 6pm to be anathema. I hope our membership continues to like a night out!

Letters to the Editor

Recently at Committee we discussed whether it would be useful to the Association if I started wading in with letters to the Gazette on any number of topics; or whether it was better to contribute to a debate rationally and through the proper channels. We decided not to change our policy. However, I would be interested to hear from members on this dilemma. Is it worth sacrificing our dignity, and perhaps some of our membership, to a higher profile and a different sort of adherent? Or do you like the way we tend to handle things?

Cleaning Up The Streets Of Berkhamsted

Not in the style of Elliot Ness (or rather, as I prefer, Elegant Mess, as Bugs Bunny would have it), but literally. Whether you think Berkhamsted is a dirty town, as seems to be the current fashion among Town Councillors, or whether you think it a good deal cleaner than when I came here 19 years ago, when the pavements were covered with dog dirt rather than the relatively less objectionable and dangerous crisp packet, please report your concerns to DBC. The officer with the unenviable task of taking your calls is Andy Bowman on 01442 228033. But remember, it's the people of Berkhamsted who drop the litter in the first place (not our membership, of course) and we could all do a bit to clear up. Funds for this sort of thing have been cut severely in recent years.



Sweeping the High Street

Berkhamsted Festival of Light

This year it takes place on Friday, 1st December and involves the usual light switching-on, street festival and, of course, Father Christmas on his sleigh. For charities, there will be a great opportunity to raise money, and shops will raise their profiles by participating in the Best Dressed Shop Window competition sponsored jointly by us and the Town Council. The Chairman will present the Cup and certificates just before the lights are switched on so please brave the cold and come to support the BCA and all the other participants that evening. Look for the posters and in the press nearer the date.

Berkhamsted Urban Design Study ("BUDS")

Committee member Colin Garrett writes:

The Berkhamsted Town Centre Forum has spawned a most useful offshoot. Unlike most bodies of this sort that tend to be all talk and no action, BUDS is producing results for all to see. The objective was to improve the access to High Street shops from the Waitrose area and the car parks and to improve the appearance of this area. Some grants are available.



Rear of the High Street. Potential for change.

One or two shopkeepers realised the potential and opened up access to the rear of their premises before BUDS started work. Most of the current hard work has been done by the professionals in the team, Percy Mark and Rob Martell, who between them have interviewed and negotiated with all concerned, drawn up plans and feasibility studies and helped with the grant scheme. When it is complete there will be three or four paths to the High Street, a pedestrian footpath along the access road, better access to the rear of the shops, less unsightly clutter and attractive signposts advertising the shops, plus of course some attractive new planting.

The forums are held quarterly, and the dates and venues of the meetings for 2000/2001 are as follows:

Date	Venue
Wednesday, 18 October 2000	Sessions Hall, Berkhamsted Town Hall
Wednesday, 24 January 2000	Clock Room, Berkhamsted Town Hall
Wednesday, 18 April 2001	Clock Room, Berkhamsted Town Hall

All meetings start at 7.30pm.

Listed Buildings



Berkhamsted School's original building, listed Grade I

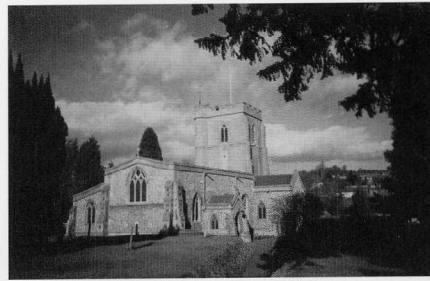
The latest figures show that in England there are 370,655 items ('building entries' in English Heritage speak) ranging from cathedrals to telephone boxes that are listed of special architectural or historic interest, and 106 of these are in Berkhamsted and

Northchurch. In the country as a whole 8908 of the building entries are in the highest category, Grade I, and we only have two of these: St Mary's Church, Northchurch, and the original Tudor building of Berkhamsted School.

The purpose of buildings being listed is to protect and identify our heritage. Listing ensures they cannot be legally demolished or altered except with specific consent. Those given Grade I or Grade II* (*two,starred*, of which we have seven) may be eligible for grants from English Heritage towards their preservation.

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 Citizen Editor: John Cook, 21 Castle Street, HP4 2DW
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St. Mary's Church Northchurch, Listed Grade I

Buildings do not have to be particularly old or beautiful to qualify for listing. The Rex, for example, was only built in 1938 (it is younger than several members of your Committee, none of whom has yet been considered worth listing), but it is listed because it contains

features in the art deco style that are considered valuable examples of a form of decoration which was fashionable in cinema architecture of that time. Once a building has been listed it is far from easy to get it de-listed.

There are three barns and two granaries on the list for Berkhamsted and Northchurch. One barn is among the buildings of



The Barn at Castle Hill Farm, listed Grade II*

Bottom Farm and has, like many others, been converted into a house. The other, the great barn at Castle Hill Farm, is really quite a spectacular building and is listed Grade II*. These days the guidelines that the planners follow discourage the conversion of historic barns into houses. That leaves everyone, including the owners, in rather a quandary as to what to do with such large buildings that have long outlived the purpose for which they were built. The BCA has made approaches to see if something

can be done to stop the barn on Castle Hill from being allowed to deteriorate any more.



The Railway Station: not yet listed.

The Association is beginning to collect data and views as to whether further buildings should be added to the list in

Berkhamsted and Northchurch. Members are invited to let us know if they feel strongly that there is a local building which is not included and should be; for example, the railway station has already been suggested. Anyone can propose a building for listing, and in the past local efforts have succeeded by this means in saving buildings from the risk of demolition or mutilation - for example the old Castle Inn. The lists are too long to print here, but the one for Berkhamsted may be viewed at the Civic Centre.

Note from the Editor

As previously indicated, I shall be giving up the editorship. This will be not later than the end of this year. If any member feels inclined to take on this interesting task please get in touch with me or Susan Johnson.