

# THE CITIZEN

The Newsletter of the Berkhamsted Citizens Association



December 2000

## Profile:



**Ken Sherwood**

Soon after he moved to Berkhamsted in 1969 Ken Sherwood became involved with local affairs, and since then he has been a prominent figure in a wide range of voluntary activities in the town.

He was chairman of the BCA from 1974 to 1976 when we celebrated our 50th anniversary, and it was he who was in the chair on the occasion of that well-remembered visit from two famous sons of Berkhamsted – Graham Greene and his brother Hugh.

A chartered accountant, Ken rose to be a partner in a major London accountancy practice, retiring from a full-time position in 1993. A growing involvement in non-profit making housing trusts culminated in his holding the chairmanship for five years of one of the major organisations of this type in our area - the Hightown Praetorian Housing Association.

From 1996 until this year he was chairman of the Berkhamsted Town Hall Trust. It was largely through his skillful and painstaking efforts in drawing up the application that the Town Hall received the grant of £225,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund, making the restoration of the Clock Room possible.

He took a leading role in setting up the Graham Greene Birthplace Trust which was established here in 1998 and has got off to such a flying start. As secretary he is still much involved in the Trust's administration.

Ken is a stalwart of Sunnyside Church, and another interest, local history, is shared by his wife Jenny who is currently the chairman of the Berkhamsted and District Local History Society. They have three grown-up children and five grandchildren.



*Graham Greene & Ken Sherwood in Berkhamsted*

## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

### 9 December 2000:

Once again it is time for the Christmas Celebration, one of the most popular events in



our calendar. There will be music and carols, with mince pies and mulled wine. Unfortunately because of its popularity this is for members only.



### 1 January 2001:

**Traditional Walk to Aldbury.** We hope that the weather will be as it was to make this year's walk such a pleasurable one. We start at Berkhamsted Railway Station at 10.30am sharp. After a pub lunch at Aldbury some of us will walk back. Bring a friend if you wish. There is no charge.

### 15 February 2001:

**'Memories of a Local Postman'** Roger Osborn who lives in the town and will be known to many members, will talk to us about his experiences as a local postman, from the time when the mail trains dropped off and picked up the mail bags at night as they steamed through Berkhamsted. It promises to be a very interesting evening.



*Collecting the mail pouch at speed through Berkhamsted*

It is early days yet but you might like to put the following events in your new year 2001 diaries:

**22 March: The AGM, Environment Awards and Open Forum**

**25 April: The Chiltern Open Air Museum and Latest Projects.**

An illustrated talk by the Director, James Moir.



*All the above will be in the Great Hall of the Town Hall, starting at 8pm. (except for the walk!).*



*New signs commemorating Berkhamsted's famous*



## CHAIRMAN'S TOPICS

*Susan Johnson, BCA's Chairman writes:*

### Never On A Tuesday - or if it's Thursday it must be BCA

You might have noticed that three out of the four weekday talks are taking place on a Thursday this year. That's not deliberate – merely the coincidence of speaker and room availability, and the diaries of your Committee members. When we set up the talks we try to spread them out over Tuesday/Wednesday/Thursday. We avoid Mondays, because that's Town Council night; not because we tow-cow to councillors (heaven forefend!) but because we think that members of a civic and amenity society should be able to exercise their democratic right to go and make a nuisance of themselves at the meetings. We naturally avoid Friday/Saturday/Sunday because people go away; have more exciting things to do etc. So that leaves mid-week. Now, would you like us to continue to try to spread the meetings out or do you like a set night? We notice that several societies stick to one day, presumably because their members get used to it and make a decision to set that night aside. We, however, have our meetings spread over so many months, it hardly seems comparable. Please give us some feedback on this issue.

### Mr Livingstone, I presume

By now you will have expressed an opinion on whether you would like a directly elected Mayor of Dacorum or whether you would prefer a leader with a cabinet. Or maybe the whole thing passed you by? These were the options given you by government; the committee system is to be abolished, whether we like it or not, and the local referendum to chose a new structure took place in October. By the time you read this, we'll probably know the outcome. Personally I think it is a step away from local democracy; one of several taken in the last 10 years or so. Maybe you would like to air your views on this to the Committee.

Mercifully no one has yet suggested that the town mayor should be directly elected! Hope all you Shrublandites voted in the recent by-elections.

### Editing – or hitting one's head...

Unless someone comes forward by the end of January there will be NO NEWSLETTER FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE. John has had to retire after more than five years and we cannot produce a newsletter without an editor. We thank John so much for all his inspired and inspiring work over the years; and we know it is a hard act to follow but PLEASE someone come

forward because the newsletter keeps us all in touch with one another and presents our organisation to the outside world. It means an automatic place on the Committee (if you would like it – it isn't compulsory, but it helps you to put things in context) and our grateful thanks. All 1,100 of us.

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## THE TOWN AMENITIES SUB-COMMITTEE

We continue to meet dutifully every month under Gordon Bluck's chairmanship. Our chief job is to scrutinise planning applications and pass our views when necessary to the planning authority, but recently there have been few that have caused us too much concern.

Perhaps the most important in the last two or three months has been the proposal greatly to enlarge Berkhamsted Cricket Club building and provide car parking for 113 cars, involving taking more agricultural land.

Older members may remember that the Cricket Club moved from its old ground in Lower Kings Road to Kitchener's Field, just off Castle Hill, in 1981. This was controversial because the new location was not only in the Green Belt but also in an area of outstanding natural beauty (AONB). Planning permission was granted but only with restrictions. The latest proposal clearly suggests that the club wants not just to enlarge its premises but also to use the building for a much wider range of activities than was originally intended. The Town Council's Planning Committee was divided on whether this would be acceptable, but we were unanimously opposed. This is unlikely to be the last time we shall be objecting to creeping development into the Green Belt round the edges of the town.



*Part of Kitchener's Field. Should this be a car park?*

The problem of parking on the pavement in the High Street after the traffic warden has gone home continues to exercise our minds, and we have written to the authorities asking for something to be done. The police seem to take little action.

## Footpath Map

Our new footpath map has been a great success, with sales exceeding all expectations. We have had numerous compliments about it - its practical worth from people who have now actually used it, and also its modest price compared with similar products in the shops. As well as being the TASC chairman, Gordon is our marketing manager, and has been busily cycling round the various outlets where the map is on sale, making sure they are kept stocked up.

## WHO IS BIG IN BERKHAMSTED?

In the 1970s and 1980s it would have been easy to say who was the biggest employer as well as being one of the largest property-owners in Berkhamsted. By a long chalk it was Cooper's and the various companies that in sequence took over from that old-established manufacturing firm. Now it has gone completely who is the largest employer and the largest landowner in the town? It must be Berkhamsted Collegiate School. It owns pretty well all the land between Castle Street and Mill Street and substantial areas off Kings Road, as well as large acreages of playing fields on the edges of the town.

Even so, the school has disposed of several bits and pieces of its property in recent years. The second-hand clothes shop in Castle Street has been converted into a handsome house, and in Chesham Road the old Prep School site and Incents Lawn have been sold off and high density housing built there.



*Flats on Incent's Lawn*

As for Cooper's land: the biggest housing developments to have hit the town in recent years are taking place on their sites in the High Street and on Berkhamsted Hill. This is likely to be followed soon by the demolition of most of the original sheep dip factory buildings and printing works between Ravens Lane and Manor Street, and for them to be replaced by flats.



*New housing in the High Street on Cooper's land*

After all this has taken place it is difficult to see where else in the town there will ever be the opportunity for a major housing development, except possibly the Stag Lane site. But we must not forget that substantial tracts of the Green Belt surrounding the town are owned by big companies, hoping that sooner or later they will manage to get planning permission to build on it. Now that nearly all the sites within the town have been used up there will surely be increasing pressure to build on some of this land.



*Flats rising on Cooper's land on Berkhamsted Hill*

## MUSIC IN BERKHAMSTED

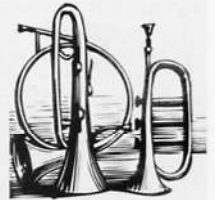
It is a source of continuing wonder that there is so much quality music in Berkhamsted. Hardly a week goes by without there being a concert of some sort or other in the town, sometimes more than one. It might be the Chiltern Chamber Choir in St Peter's, the Dacorum Sinfonietta in the Town Hall, a professional Jazz Club or Music Society concert in the Civic Centre or the Berkhamsted Choral Society or other concert in the Collegiate School. Then there are good church choirs with in the case of St Peter's, a professional master of the music and organist.



And is there anywhere else of the size of Berkhamsted that can rustle up its own symphony orchestra?

The Bridgewater Band puts on full-blown concerts of an enviably

high quality, almost raising the roof of St Peter's Church or the Centenary Hall and leaving a lasting impression on those who are fortunate enough to be there to hear them.



## Arcades

With all this rain you need all the shelter you can get. Berkhamsted is not noted for its arcades, but by way of a seasonal quiz, are you able to recognise these four? Answers at the bottom of page four.



## OUR TRAINS

At a recent conference I heard a director of the National Express Group (which is the largest provider of passenger train services, including Silverlink trains) say that planning for the modernisation of our railway line – the inappropriately named West Coast Main Line – has a ‘Virgin-centric base’. What he meant by that was that it was being targeted on meeting the future greatly increased demands of Virgin’s express trains at the expense of providing adequately for the other services which will be using the busiest main line in the world.

By the time this issue of the Citizen is published Chris Green will have given his talk to the Association on the plans for the West Coast line. But it is not only competition for space on the line between Virgin and Silverlink that is causing concern. At the conference Lord Berkeley, chairman of the Rail Freight Group, said that not enough provision was being made for the growth of freight on the



*New heavy track on the up fast through Berkhamsted*

line. They want to run 750 metre long trains up and down it, and quite a lot of them.

As far as travellers from Berkhamsted are concerned there is yet another threat. Silverlink want to increase the part of their business that provides for people travelling to London from Northampton and Milton Keynes.

They are planning a major ‘parkway’ type station with a huge car park near Northampton, close to the M1, to which people will drive from all over and catch the train to London. You can bet that the trains which provide for this potentially lucrative traffic will not be stopping at Berkhamsted. Even as things are at present it is galling for commuters waiting at Berkhamsted Station when the service is disrupted to see the fast Silverlink trains whizz through without stopping, often half empty, leaving all of us to cram onto a crowded later train. Some of the non-stop Silverlink trains are squeezed in between the Virgin trains on the fast lines; otherwise they have to go on the slow lines, and the slow lines may be the only option for them in the future.

In all this competing for space on the railway, who is standing up for the commuters of Berkhamsted? Not, I suspect, Railtrack or any of the train operating companies. But there are now the Rail Regulator and the Strategic Rail Authority: it is their responsibility to be looking after the interests of all rail passengers, and we should be putting as much pressure as we can on them.



*The new tilting trains that will speed through Berkhamsted*

Even so, it seems unlikely that after all the vast investment planned for the West Coast line has been spent that there will be any more trains stopping at Berkhamsted than we have now, and there could well be fewer. As Berkhamsted’s nationally-known rail expert Richard Hope said in the Gazette recently: ‘This leaves Silverlink in the position that they are going to be the only commuter operator into London who will be providing a worse service than they did in the 1990s.’

**And just one final plea for a new editor. For whoever takes it on it need not be an open-ended commitment. You may like to offer to do it for just a year or two. The format could be changed too.**

**I must say I have really quite enjoyed it. Many thanks to all the contributors and to Bob in the Print Shop for being so helpful; but after 22 issues and with advancing years and diminishing faculties I really must now hand on the baton.**

### The arcades – the answers:

- A - Berkhamsted Collegiate School, Castle Campus.
- B - Waitrose.
- C - The railway station.
- D - the office building on the corner of Park View Road.

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