

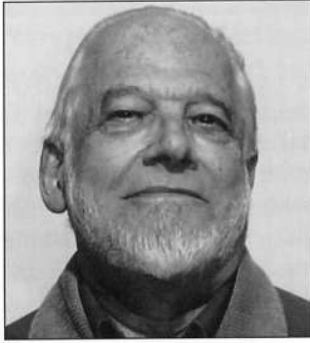
THE CITIZEN

The Newsletter of the Berkhamsted Citizens Association



June 2000

Profile:



Max Hageman

Max Hageman moved to Berkhamsted in 1967, attracted by the prospect of the new electrified train service, linking at Euston with the Victoria Line which was then under construction. He settled here with his growing family, but commuting did not last long for him. Within a year or two, following take-overs of his firm he decided to work as a freelance designer from home. Berkhamsted proved to be a providential location for this. By road, rail and from Heathrow and Luton, all his clients spread around the UK and abroad could be well served from Berkhamsted.

Max joined the Association in the early 70s and was soon on the Committee. Ever since then we have greatly benefitted from his professional skills. Our logo – the one at the top of this page – was designed by him, something of which he is justifiably proud; it has stood the test of time and still looks fresh and contemporary after being in use for well over 20 years. Max continues to help with the design and production of the posters advertising our events.

Susan Johnson, *our new Chairman, writes:*

When the Editor suggested I might like to write something about what I would like to achieve in my time as Chairman, I thought immediately of the length of rope with which you are traditionally invited to hang yourself. Still, ever one to plunge in...



I suppose you become Chairman because you've got something to say and think you can make a difference by saying it. Equally, you've got to lead a team and it's no good if they don't feel inclined to follow you. So, having been a part of that team under the marvellous leadership of John Cook (now only mischievous Editor, and not for much longer

if he can find his desired successor) I hope I can tread the narrow path between leadership and dictatorship, and take the Committee and membership with me to begin to achieve the following:

- To raise the BCA's profile and, consequently, increase membership without alienating our current members
- To generate pride in the town's Conservation Area amongst residents and businesses and persuade Dacorum Borough Council to act more robustly in this field
- To work with the Borough and Town Councils to try to involve local people, members or not, in making decisions about local issues
- To persuade members that it needn't be all worthy and serious to take part in the Association's activities.

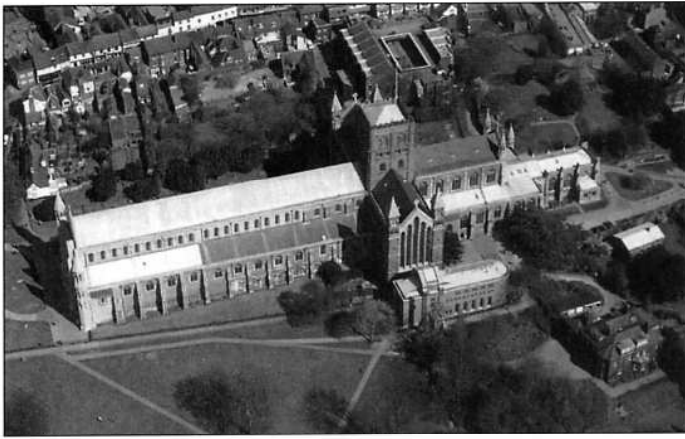


The High Street - the core of the Conservation Area

The BCA is not a pressure group or a one-issue group – it is concerned with *exerting influence* for what it perceives as the good of the town. This might involve opposing or, very occasionally, actively supporting planning applications (see my later article on The Rex); it will involve commenting on diverse consultation documents on a variety of subjects affecting our day-to-day lives; and it will definitely involve offering a variety of talks and activities which members are invited to enjoy. It also produces occasional publications and helps other local societies in their activities. In other words, it is an organisation concerned with *citizenship*, not just residence.

And that brings me back to John Cook. John was recently formally honoured by the Town Council for his citizenship of Berkhamsted, and I can't think of a more worthy recipient of that honour. Still, it's no more than we Citizens knew already!

Forthcoming Events



St. Albans Abbey

Most of us know that the present St Albans Cathedral was originally a great Norman abbey - the premier abbey of England. Its history goes back to Saxon times and earlier.

On Sunday, 18 June there will be a guided tour of the Abbey, starting at the west end of the building at 2.30 pm, led by John Cook who is a guide there. If you would like to come on the tour please let Gill Feil (865752) know as soon as possible. There is a nice refectory in the Abbey for refreshments afterwards.

Details of next season's events will be given in the Autumn issue of the newsletter. Among the forthcoming events we are very fortunate that Chris Green, a Berkhamsted resident and Chief Executive of Virgin Trains, has agreed to come to talk to us. This is programmed for Thursday, 16 November.



Chris Green

Town Amenities

Gordon Bluck, Chairman of the Town Amenities Sub-Committee, writes:

Since my last report John Cook has stepped down as Association Chairman. In that capacity he had been attending monthly planning meetings and will continue to do so. Our new Chairman Susan Johnson has also been a member of my sub-Committee and will stay on it ex-officio. Susan is a worthy successor to the Chair of the Association and is passionate about the town and its evolution.

The three of us attended the Annual Town Meeting in April and I was personally saddened by the lack of understanding on matters affecting the town. This is a personal view from someone who has not yet reached 50 but has been your TASC Chairman for some eight years. I have written over 225 letters of mostly objection in that time and worked hard with my committee colleagues to put a balanced view on matters affecting the town. Why is it that single interest groups pop up, get passionate when their own space is threatened, and then drop out of the scene? It would be far better if they would use their talents for the long-term good of the town - by getting involved with the BCA.

At the Town meeting I am sure some of those who spoke were unaware of the work done by both us and the Town Council in trying to get a good result while working within the planning regulations and understanding the sheer practicalities of life. Now I have said my bit, what have we done over the last few months? Well, one of the most important items to have arisen has been the proposed upgrading of the West Coast Main Line for



The Town Hall improvements earned the BCA 1999 Environment Award

Railtrack and its impact on Dudswell and Tunnel Fields. The Association has objected to the Department of the Environment and the Regions on the basis that these changes should be subject to the normal planning process and not 'nodded through' on statutory powers given to the railway authorities. I have received letters from both the DETR and Railtrack and it has now been confirmed that there will be a public enquiry at which we will be able to press this point. Railtrack have confirmed they will contact us to discuss our objections.



Railtrack want to build shafts from the tunnel under the Chiltern Park estate

Turning to the Manor Street/Ravens Lane possible development, we have noted that more evidence is coming forward regarding the contamination, and we will stay involved in the debate. A plan to develop the site at 286-290 High Street to a Kwik-Fit facility has been put forward and we have suggested modifications to the materials and the barrier on the High Street side.



This gap in the High Street may be built on.

We are pleased that plans for two new houses at the rear of 10/12/14 Anglefield Road has not gone ahead as it was the wrong sort of infill development.

Once again, if any member of the Association wants to know our current thinking or to influence it on any matter please phone me on Berkhamsted 873548 (evenings please).



The improved towpath - but why so wiggly?

The new Footpath Map

Berkhamsted Citizens Association's new footpath map will be available in the bookshops soon. Do look out for it: the draft that was displayed at our AGM gave a glimpse of the quality of this brand-new work.

The first edition of our local footpath map was made as long ago as 1938 by Edward Stanford. That firm was taken over by another cartographic company, George Philip, and it was Philips whom the BCA approached with a view to having a new footpath map made to mark the Millennium. By the oddest of coincidences one of that firm's cartographers, Bill Willett, had just retired and lived in Berkhamsted, and to cut a long story short it is our good fortune that Bill agreed to take on the preparation of the map.

The process of making a map of this sort today is too complex to describe in any detail here, but it comprises two principal elements: firstly slogging away in front of a computer and secondly trudging away walking miles and miles checking footpaths and other features, a task which can still only be done properly on the ground. Both these tasks Bill has completed virtually single-handed.



Bill Willett checks it out

To base the map on the Ordnance Survey would have involved a royalty payment of about 20p a copy, so the basic material used was the previous map and aerial photographs held by Herts and Bucks Councils, all processed through Bill's powerful Apple computer and using a mapping software package called Freehand.



Footpaths are well styled

The map covers a rectangle with corners of approximately Caddington, Nash Mills, Chesham Bois and Cheddington, about 283 square kilometres or 108 square miles – a sizeable area. The map will also have a larger-scale map of the Berkhamsted urban area with an emphasis on the routes leading out into the countryside.

Bill Willett writes:

Three-quarters of the map is in Dacorum and we are well-served by the local authority footpaths officer. The paths are well marked, cleared and 'styled' and I cannot think of any blocked or troublesome paths. One or two 'Bull in Field' signs proved to refer to bulls that according to the farmer wouldn't



hurt a fly. I think I encountered more ram and aggressive dog problems than bulls. Horses and ostriches (yes ostriches) are inquisitive. Question: Where are there ostriches and llamas within the map area, apart from Whipsnade?



The checking was fascinating. Firstly it got me into country that I had not explored and also connected up one path with another that I had covered on separate occasions; also to discover the very attractive and diverse landscapes that we have around us and often within a mile of one another: the Ashridge woods and the Nettleden - Water End stretch, or the beechwoods and green lanes of Ley Hill - Chesham, for example. Also the changing land use was reflected in the changes required to the map. Of course many hedges had gone (all rural hedges are shown on the map) to make some huge fields, but many and complex fence patterns had been put in to manage the grazing of horses. I would think the field on the right climbing from Nettleden or the one to the west of Cowcroft near Ley Hill are among the largest.



All rural hedges are shown on the map

One has to say that there are few walkers on the paths and I hope the map in some small way will encourage more people out onto them. But the few people that I did see made for good conversation, often funny. Small dog coming for me - lady owner shouts that I was all right because I hadn't got trousers on (I was wearing shorts); had I had trousers on, which the said small dog did not like "e would 'av 'ad yer".

There are some strange, if not hideous sights: many farms are seas of mud surrounded by rusting piles of old machinery; some of the storage sites question planning decisions, and the dam-like view approaching the chalk quarry from Kensworth – not to mention some of the battery pig-farms.

I have tried to show on the map all churches and pubs and the few tea-rooms. The first are some of the greatest places in our countryside, and the latter provide welcome repast for the good walker. I have attempted to make the footpaths clear in relation to roads, hedges and buildings. I hope that this new map will be useful to walkers and tempt more out into our quiet and pretty byways.



Wouldn't hurt a fly: a long-horn at Frithsden

The REX Susan Johnson has views:

After the style of the authors of "1066 and All That", I will unashamedly state that I think the restoration of The Rex as a working cinema to be "a good thing". I know I run the risk of having half our membership shout me down (although I would like to be proved wrong in that assertion), but I like Art Deco architecture and I love cinema, so getting The Rex to look as it should and providing a great local place of entertainment for a wide range of tastes and age-groups seems a worthy aim.



The Rex's projection room will go.

The Rex has become an eyesore because it has been left to rot by its owners for whatever cynical reasons. The Rex Film and Arts Centre Trust has formed a plan to bring it back into practical use for a wide cross-section of people over a wide area and I urge you to support its ideas. The planning application is due to come up at DBC's Development Control Committee shortly and, should it be successful, a drive to raise funds to buy and renovate the building will follow. The sticking point is likely to be car parking provision; ironic when you consider that, when the cinema was built in 1938, the car park could probably have accommodated every car owned by the town's residents!

Your Committee backs me in my particular obsession and has written giving the Association's support to the Trust's plans on the grounds that The Rex is important to the town centre and Conservation Area, both in architectural and social terms.

It would be wonderful if we could see the next blockbuster and the next Graham Greene Festival offering side by side in The Rex and not have to trek to Hemel Hempstead. The detractors say it can't be done. Well, they said that about the Town Hall and now look at it.

The Rex Film & Arts Centre Trust can be contacted at 11 Hall Park, Berkhamsted, HP4 2NU Tel: 01442 864058 (Jon Smurthwaite).

Graham Greene and Berkhamsted

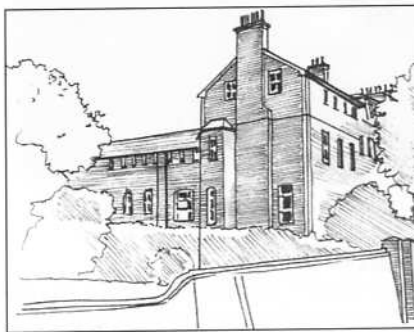
The presentation called *The Smell of Innocence*, was given to a joint meeting of the BCA and the Graham Greene Birthplace Trust on 27 April.



Graham Greene

Committee member Paul Gilbert reports:

Members and supporters of the two organisations were given a rare treat when Roger Watkins, the director of the first two Graham Greene Festivals, gave a fascinating talk entitled '*The Smell of Innocence*' which included a dramatised adaptation of Greene's story *The Innocent*.



Greene's birthplace in Chesham Road.

With the aid of readings by Anthea and Patrick Lepper of extracts from Graham Greene's books, Roger concentrated his talk on the 'Berkhamsted Connection', and how, as a result of Greene's experiences of his childhood spent as the son of the headmaster of Berkhamsted

School, Charles Greene, he again and again brought into his writings references to the town, either naming it directly or using a substituted fictional name.

For over 60 years the town haunted his imagination and must have had an enormous impact on his childhood and adolescence for he constantly included in his novels references to the town's local scenes including its castle, streets, canal and public houses.

Those of us interested in his works (I belong to a monthly Graham Greene reading group headed by Yan Christensen) particularly recall the game of 'Russian Roulette' played at the Common during his youth.



Russian Roulette played on the Common

The Human Factor and The Captain & the Enemy were amongst many books which had mentioned the town, and in his autobiography *A Sort of Life* he says 'If I had known it, the whole future must have lain all along those Berkhamsted streets'.

Three talented Sixth Form students gave extraordinarily professional performances in his short story *The Innocent*, superbly dramatised and narrated by David Pearce, recently retired head of English at Berkhamsted School. Phile Evans, music master, tastefully provided piano accompaniment.

A wonderfully enjoyable and well attended evening, and it is hoped that we may have other such joint meetings in the future. Grateful thanks to all participants.

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