



**Berkhamsted
Citizens
Association**

NEWSLETTER

June 1995

Editor's Musings

It is an amazing thought. We are only a few days away from the longest day and my body clock is still adjusted to the shortest day. Perhaps I am odd but I always get a shock at this time of year when I realise that the year is halfway gone.

So I am afraid you will have to put up with a shocked editor who still thinks it is winter: not a promising start.

What was a great success, however, was the VE celebration. I have never seen so many people in the centre of Berkhamsted. It really made the senses tingle to see such a jolly throng as we approached. You could feel the excitement. Mind you, the very size of the throng presented one or two problems to citizens of modest dimension. My wife and I watched an enthusiastic display of Scottish dancing which consisted of the occasional appearance of a head above the crowd with nary a sporrán or a kilt in sight and if there is one thing I like, it is a good sporrán swinging in the breeze. However, apart from such minor elements of deprivation we thought it was a great day and a lot of credit to the organisers.

Reactions received were so favourable that the Association is going to suggest that there should be a yearly event, a Berkhamsted day, to the incoming Mayor. Perhaps we can persuade him to leap about in a sporrán.

The VJ day celebration will be in the Castle grounds on August 20th. This will be different in type, taking the form of a drum head service. This day, of course, was the actual end of the war (the 15th to be precise). VE day was the great explosion of relief for the whole population, the first day in six years when you could go to bed in the certainty that the bombers would not come. For those in the forces, however, there were three more long months before we could look forward to coming home and, believe me, that was also a day to remember.

One fruit of that titanic struggle was freedom to hold elections and this has now been done. The electorate has decided on a big change. One can only speculate on what differences may result. The Association will, of course, continue with its non-political policy of contacts with the new councils, trying to understand their policies, giving the Association's views, agreeing with or disagreeing with their actions according to circumstances.

The Association has been bending its mighty (collective) mind to the problem of how one regards listed buildings which are plug ugly, to wit the Rex Cinema. I have never met anyone who has a good word to say for it in its present condition. It seems greatly unloved. Yet it undoubtedly was a very attractive cinema in its day and is a good example of one of the better designed 30s provincial cinemas. It is the foyer which is its greatest attraction. The positions of staircase and booking office were well balanced and the textured plasterwork (so much a feature of the age) was pleasing and, as I recollect,

more subdued than many of its contemporaries with appropriate lighting. The details I cannot remember, I have not seen the interior for many years. I do not even know if it is still intact. I believe it is the foyer which leads to its Grade II listing. I would not have thought the outside was all that remarkable, apart from a reasonably attractive entrance, the rest was simply a square brick box with a row of shops. All fairly typical of its day but I do not ever recollect it as a particularly memorable feature on the skyline.

The dilemma of course is this: the object of listing is to preserve for future generations good examples of an era which might otherwise be recklessly obliterated. Few would object to such aspirations, but should we not also ask, for what purpose? Might I suggest (from the lofty pinnacle of no knowledge of aesthetics or the guidelines to listing whatsoever) that there is a purpose if, by listing a building, a harmonious balance of buildings in an area is preserved for all to see and enjoy albeit subconsciously. If, however, there is a feature which is invisible and likely to remain so, what exactly have we achieved? I would say that if such a feature was to remain in a building which could be adapted to some other use where it was part of a living structure then again I would say there is a purpose. Outside that I would be inclined to say that a really special case would have to be made to warrant listing.

This is not to say, of course, that we should heed the crocodile tears of that most unlovable of breeds, property developers who will always see the easiest way to make a quick buck and use any tactic or excuse to achieve it. On the other hand, we must be fairly pragmatic about what we should insist upon.

None of this has indicated how the Association has resolved the line to take on the Rex. That is because there is not one. However, there are to be discussions with the Dacorum Heritage Officer to explore possibilities.

Is anyone prepared to turn it back into a cinema? Wouldn't that be nice!

Town Hall

Work on a lift for the disabled will commence shortly. A cinema screen and curtains are to be installed. Tenders have been invited for a public address system.

Activities

14th July. Summer Wine at Berkhamsted School. 8.00p.m.

Next season's programme will follow traditional lines, and there is advance notice that the Christmas Party will be held on Saturday 16th December.

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