

THE CITIZEN



The Newsletter of the Berkhamsted Citizens Association

December 1996

PROFILE:

Christopher Talbot-Ponsonby



BCA's Membership Secretary Christopher T-P was just one year old when he arrived in Berkhamsted. His concern for local affairs is probably in his genes: both his parents have over the years been well known figures in causes in Berkhamsted and Northchurch.

Christopher's connection with the Berkhamsted Citizens Association goes back over 20 years. Since 1975 he has been involved with the printing and distribution of the newsletter, and for the last six years he has been our membership secretary.

Committee members are greatly impressed by the thorough way he does this job: the statements he presents are a model of completeness and conciseness, with glints of humour among the statistics.

Since 1986 he has been a Trustee of Berkhamsted Town Hall Trust, and its Assistant Treasurer from the time the Interim Trustees were established in 1978. A sideline he runs is the second-hand bookstall in the Town Hall Arcade which has so far raised an astonishing £14,000 for the Trust in thirteen years.

Christopher is with English Heritage, currently in the conservation team for north and east London working with architects, town planners and surveyors. He supposes his awareness and interest for architecture stems back to the days when he went round Berkhamsted with his mother looking at planning applications when she was on the Berkhamsted UDC in the early 1960's.

Apart from his job and local interests he find time to enjoy walking - in Scotland and abroad.



FORTHCOMING BCA EVENTS



For this year's Christmas celebration on **Saturday 14th December** we can look forward to a return of some of the choir of St Paul's Church, Langleybury, who entertained us in 1994.

They will lead the audience in the carols and also perform themselves. Our Chairman, Graham Spittle, is the choir's conductor, so we can expect to be amused as well as entertained. He will also bring along some soloists. There will be hot punch and mince pies. This event will be in the **Great Hall in the Town Hall at 8.00pm.**



On 1st January 1997 there will be our traditional **New Year's Day Ramble to Aldbury**. We meet at the **Railway Station at**



10.30am. and move to Aldbury for a pub lunch.



Aldbury for lunch on New Year's Day

On 27th February Sir Christopher Walford, last year's Lord Mayor of London, will talk about his year in the Mansion House. This will be in the **Great Hall of the Town Hall at 8.00pm.**

Please make a note in your diary for 20th March 1997 when we hold our AGM and an open forum, and present the Environmental Awards. There will be more details in the next issue of The Citizen.

BERKHAMSTED COMMON

Our Common stretches in a great arc almost four miles long from Potten End to Northchurch. It is of course a local asset of enormous amenity value; but is it in fact our Common? Who owns it, and who has rights over it? The answers are, unfortunately, not what we may have wished.

Historically the Common was the great waste of Berkhamsted Manor over which privileges were enjoyed by local people, like the right to graze cattle and to cut gorse. Since the early 17th century the story of the Common has been one of loss of public rights, largely abetted by the local population, or at least with their indifference.



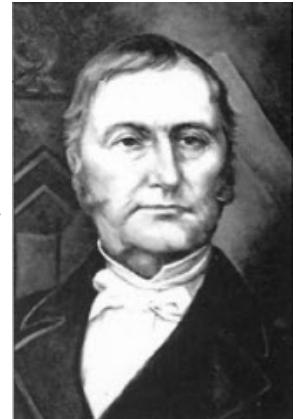
Across Well farm to the Common

Parts of it have been lost over the years by enclosure, like Coldharbour Farm. Twice in its history attempts have been made to enclose the bulk of the Common by fencing it in: in the 17th and again in the 19th centuries. In both cases a local champion was found to mobilise a workforce and in dramatic night raids to pull down the fences. The second of these gentlemen was Augustus Smith, who is still seen as something of a local hero.

But all this was not to much avail in the end. The Common was sold off, and much of it is now owned by the Golf Club; some of it by the National Trust. Both these organisations allow reasonable free public access, but the only actual rights most of us have are to use footpaths and bridleways. Commoners' rights have almost disappeared - but not quite.

Commoners' Rights

Three commoners who lived in Frithesden took the trouble to register their rights under the Commons Registration Act before the closing date in 1965 (It is too late now if you think you may have had a claim). These include the rights of *Haybot and Woodbote* and to cut furze, gorse and underwood etc.



*Augustus Smith
Local hero*



The Club House - Berkhamsted Golf Club

Michael and Ruth Quartermaine were those who successfully claimed these rights. They later wrote that they not aware of any particular importance attached to them, which they regarded as somewhat of an archaic joke - until 1978, when the Golf Club put in an application to build a second golf club adjacent to the present one. Although there was a big outcry among the citizens of Berkhamsted and a petition was got up, it turned out that only commoners had the right to stop the Golf Clubs intentions.

In fact the application failed to get planning approval, but even if this had been successful it would only have taken the veto of one commoner to frustrate the project. The commoners have also been successful in preventing other infringements of the Common such as its use for agriculture. Their rights rest with the property, and when the occupancy changes, the commoner's rights go with it.

The fact that commoners no longer cut furze etc. and graze cattle and sheep is a principal reason why the appearance of the Common has changed so much in recent decades. From being largely covered in bracken, gorse and heather it is now substantially wooded, except where the Golf Club keeps the growth down. An attempt is currently being made to reverse this process in an effort to save some of the indigenous flora and fauna

One final point of interest: while much of the Common is within the ecclesiastical parish of Berkhamsted St Peter, hardly any of it is within the civil parish of Berkhamsted. Some of it is in Potten End, and the civil parish of Northchurch stretches right round as far as the golf clubhouse. Thus the Rector of Berkhamsted has the cure of souls there (if he can find any), but the Town Mayor, should he feel moved to walk across the Golf Course with his chain on, would first have to ask permission of the Chairman of Northchurch Parish Council. We in Berkhamsted may think of it as our Common, but it is only that in name.



From gorse to woodland

Anyway, whatever the legalities it does seem that the Common is sale in one form or another for us all to continue to enjoy into the foreseeable future as a lovely place of recreation.

Eau de Berkhamsted

The company which supplies Berkhamsted's water - Three Valleys Water - is now owned by Generale des Eaux, a giant French company which is into much more than water here in England; for example it is currently buying up bits of British Rail.

In November, Committee members were shown round Berkhamsted's much improved pumping station and treatment works which has been completed this year in the heart of the town, just off Greene Field Road. We were greatly impressed by what we saw.

It is all very well designed and spick and span, and the new building there received a BCA special commendation this year for its appearance. The comment was passed that if we had seen the interior of the buildings before, the Association might have given the inside an award as well as the outside.

All our water is pumped out of the ground on this site, then filtered through great cylinders full of granular carbon to remove traces of substances like pesticides. Ultra violet light is then shone through it to break down any DNA. Finally it is given a tiny dose of what to all intents and purposes is domestic bleach before being pumped up to the reservoir at Kingshill.

The whole process produces water with a bit of sparkle to it and of a much improved quality over what we have had in the past. The new plant will meet demand up to the year 2020, which should be long enough for BCA members of my generation. Three Valleys seem to have everything very much under control now, except for the supply of their basic raw material - steady rain.

At the opening ceremony of the new building a handsome brass plaque was unveiled to record that it received a BCA commendation last year.



The Town mayor unveils the plaque. Graham Spittle, BCA Chairman, applauds

TOWN AMENITIES

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

A lot has happened since my last report. There is positive proof that not all planners go to get their knees brown in August as some of them issue documents like SEERPLAN - A Fresh Strategy for South East England, and its accompanying Sustainable Principles. Written in June, received by me for the BCA in mid August with response by the end of that month. We did not have time to reply.

This half baked situation contrasts with the attitude of Dacorum Planning (SERPLAN is a London based quango) who copy us with all the important planning documents, and more importantly give us time to respond (or rather normally do. Remember the cable TV cabinets?). I and a number of my committee are aged 40/50 holding down very full jobs, and do not have all day to devote to these matters.

A prime example of this co-operation is the Borough Local Plan, already a fine piece of work and the planning 'bible'. This now has an Alterations Package 1996 which has improved it even further. A copy is in the library.

We have lent our support to this document, particularly as regards the newly commissioned study of parking demand in the town and the greater use of 'Article 4' directions to restrict further unwelcome changes to the conservation area.

Other matters discussed in the last few months include:

1) As I indicated in my last report, we opposed the Berkhamsted Schools' application for a new joint prep school on a playing field. As it turned out the application was withdrawn a few hours before the planning meeting. There had been overwhelming opposition and I wonder if the school should be involving the Chiltern Society / BCA / Town Council and other local bodies in view of the impact on the open spaces in the town.

2) In the last week we have been asked by Dacorum Planning to give out thoughts on the AgrEvo site as it is to close from August 1997. The area is large at two hectares and if its owners decide to sell for redevelopment what can be done for the best interests of the town and its new owners. Should it be high density low cost housing, a mixture of live and work units or retained as an industrial site? We will report back our recommendations.

3) We were disappointed that despite the Dacorum Licensing sub-committee refusing the late licence for 'Cheerleaders' the owners have gone to appeal (as of course they are entitled to do) through the Courts, and will continue to open late until that is heard. The original licence was obtained through the Courts despite refusal by Dacorum. The previously mentioned local plan encourages residents to live over the shop in the High Street, and noise in the early hours will go against this policy. We hope the Courts will support refusal.

4) We have pressed for and it has been accepted that the original plan for a bus stop on the High Street near the Waitrose development outside the YMCA shop will go ahead : a major victory for those people without cars not able to walk all the way from the old Waitrose bus stop (which will incidentally remain).

5) A new application has been submitted to increase the number of houses proposed on the Fleurfield land in Kingsdale Road to four, up from the three for which permission has been granted. As we have consistently opposed what has happened in that area by over-development we will do so again.

6) Work continues on the improvement to the canalside through the 'CARP' project team, which is now a sub-committee of the Town Council.

Stop Press

Just before we went to press some of the BCA committee led by our Chairman met members and officers of Dacorum Borough Council.

Councillor Julia Coleman, leader of the Council, was in the chair. The Chief Executive was there together with the Chairs of various committees.

This was the second meeting of the sort this year, and both sides have found them enlightening. They are informal and not minuted. A range of subjects affecting Berkhamsted were discussed, and it is only possible to cover some of them briefly here.

New Housing

Perhaps the most important was the Structure Plan for Hertfordshire which envisages 250 new homes being built in Berkhamsted - but where? That is the big question.

The Borough Council is generally opposed to development on Green Belt land, but they say hard decisions may have to be made which could require some bending of this principle in certain areas.

The type of housing envisaged is described as 'affordable', which essentially means small homes which will be taken up by local people, and not executive houses which could simply draw new people into the area.

The consultation procedures are due to start very soon, and the BCA will be closely involved in them.

The Rex



The Rex today - A blot on the Town

On the Rex, the Borough Council is very much aware of local concern, but there was some irritation that assumptions had been made by some in Berkhamsted about the measures that the Council were prepared to take.

They were not likely to support de-listing of the building, nor were they budgeting to spend a substantial amount on it. Compulsory purchase by the Council was not ruled out but it seems that that would only be a very last option.

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