



June 2011

The Citizen

Newsletter of the Berkhamsted Citizens Association

Working for the social and civic life of our community

CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN

Hello to all you Citizens! Thank you for re-electing me as your Chairman for the ensuing year. It's a pleasure to lead an enthusiastic committee in another round of activities and representations.

The AGM was quite well attended and the highlight was, as ever, the presentation by John Cook of the Environment Awards. John is currently not at all well, and we wish him a speedy recovery. The Awards did not include a plaque this year (nothing quite outstanding enough) but there were three certificates of Commendation: to Canal Fields (DBC/BTC), two new houses in Elm Grove (local architect Edward Hunt), and The Gables restoration in Gravel path (local developer Sarah Jeavon).

We did manage to attract one new Committee member – Paul Crosland of Upper Hall Park. He is profiled in these pages. But we could do with a few more Committee members to spread the load. Think seriously about helping out. We awarded Life Membership to Rita Jones for 19 years (and continuing) on the Committee and 10 years leading Activities. You don't have to contemplate that amount of time, but a year or two would go down well. Come along to sit in on a meeting to find out what it would entail.

There are a number of current issues which are covered in this newsletter, which I am currently producing with the help of Katy Brookes-Duncan and a helpful printer. If you have any expertise in this area, please do think about volunteering to take over this role. Norman Cutting did a sterling job over 10 years, and we thank him for it; but now it's the turn of another.

You'll see a few more of my efforts elsewhere in here, and some articles from new, as well as the usual, contributors. Please feel free to email me any contributions and we'll try to use them in future issues. Keep in touch and, above all, let us know what you think.

Susan Johnson

Schools' Expansion

The unexpected rise in the birth rate five years ago caught Herts County Council on the hop. They haven't got enough nursery places for all the children in Berkhamsted. Numbers are up in the state sector due to the recession, but you would have thought HCC would have woken to

accommodate the extra numbers, but there were inevitably objections from local people, mainly around transport problems. The BCA put in suggestions that any expansion should have an associated robust transport plan and that the buildings be of the highest environmental standards. It also suggested that a long-term solution might be to expand Bridgewater School with a first school addition, particularly to help those families living on the north side of the valley who presently have to cross the valley to go to school. The plans have been put on hold for further consideration and, meanwhile, temporary classrooms bridge the gap.

Road Repairs

County Councillor Ian Reay kindly spoke at our AGM about road conditions. We all bemoan the sorry state of our road surfaces and want to know what Herts Highways can do about it. Well, now the new financial year has started the contractors are out and the repairs are underway – slowly. Councillor Reay admitted it would take £100m to bring Herts roads up to scratch and barely £30m is available. So, in other words, they'll do what they can to keep the surfaces reasonable. If you want to report potholes and other faults, go on line to Herts Direct. And if you want to suggest particular repairs to the High Street, tell Councillor Reay or Paul Trustram, the HCC Area Manager, direct. Councillor Reay, along with other HCC councillors, has a personally-attributed budget which he could use to help. If you don't ask, you don't get!



Elm Grove



The Gables, Gravel Path

Old Pub Signs

It's not only pubs which are disappearing at a rate of knots, but the old hanging signs that belong to the ones that survive. Signs for The Lamb and The George in Berkhamsted High Street disappeared, to be replaced respectively by a silly and a boring one. Now the King's Arms (I know, it's really the Queen's, Queen Anne to be exact) sign has gone and an advertisement application gone in to replace it with one that, if not objectionable, is not a patch on the original. The BCA is fighting for the reinstatement of the original which, it is told, is still on the premises. This pub/hotel is a listed building. The refurbishment has so far been good. Let's not see it spoilt for a small but significant detail. Let's stand up for the built heritage of the High Street.

Trees Beside the Station

We miss the trees which used to abut the road opposite the bridge over the canal from Castle Street into Lower Kings Road/Station Road. They were removed by DBC at the behest of Network Rail as they had the 'wrong sort of leaves' at too high a level. Now there is an opportunity to have them replaced (at least some of them) with a more suitable species if the BCA is willing to put up 75% of the cost. DBC would put up the rest – they have a very small tree planting budget. We would like to do this, just as we did two years ago in Castle Hill/Castle Hill Avenue with the limes. We were thinking of devoting £2,000 of our Map Fund to this, and wondered whether you agreed. Please let us know if you think it is a good idea to add some more greenery to the street scene in the centre of town.

While we are on the subject of trees, how about other roads' residents clubbing together to have trees reinstated to their pavement edges?

Do you live in a Rew house?

Charles Henry Rew, the architect, moved to Berkhamsted together with his young family in 1884. His younger son, Noel Ackroyd Rew, followed his father into the same profession. Shortly before his father's death in 1912 Noel joined him in practice in Berkhamsted. A number of buildings designed by the Rews still stand today. Some are no more. Charles Henry Rew is well-remembered for the building of the Chapel and Deans' Hall at Berkhamsted School and, probably with the assistance of his son, for the building of the School's library and more notably All Saints' Church. Their legacy was however much greater. Victoria Girls' School, still in use today, was a Rew design and also the former Post Office in Lower Kings Road, now replaced.

Apart from these large buildings the Rews designed a number of houses in Berkhamsted and Potten End, and Boxmoor too, at the request of local people. We have identified two of the houses Charles Henry Rew designed in Berkhamsted: Stonycroft in Shrublands Road and Kilfillan; and one house in Potten End designed by Noel Ackroyd Rew but we know from evidence available at the RIBA there were many more. The next obvious research step to take would be to consult the archives of Dacorum Borough Council where the former Berkhamsted Urban District and Rural District Councils' archives are now housed, but these are at present closed because of financial cutbacks.

This is where we need your help. In many instances we know the name of the person for whom the house was designed but not the name of the house or exactly where it was. In any case names of houses are frequently changed over the years. If any of you have the deeds to your house look at them to see if the name of the architect is mentioned on the plans or anywhere else in the documents. If you have ever heard it suggested that yours is a Rew house please do let us know. Noel Ackroyd was still practising in Berkhamsted at least until the mid 1950s. He died in Surrey in 1971.

If you can help in anyway please contact:
Jenny Sherwood, 01442 865158
KShew9100@aol.com or Susan Johnson,
01442 875517, scgjohnson@btinternet.com

The Millennium Garden

Freda Earl

Would you like an attractive all year-round garden with minimum care? Sounds too good to be true? Go down to Canal Fields (over the footbridge from Waitrose) and you will see, beyond the children's playground, the Millennium Garden. In its original place by the footbridge it was designed to demonstrate that a (town) council can create a beautiful, colourful garden with all year round interest for a fraction of the cost of hothouse raised bedding plants.

When the long search for a place to put a skate park finally ended in Canal Fields, it seemed best to move the Millennium Garden and redesign it. There is something to see there all year. I look after the dry bed. The structure is provided by taller plants like the verbascums and the prairie grasses which are there all year either as growing plants or dried seed heads which look stunning after frost. The gravel is there to set off the spreading plants which flower at different times of year, from pulmonarias which feed the early bees to michaelmas daisies which provide nectar for the late butterflies as well as looking stunning.

Looking at the garden it is hard to see how it can be maintained by three volunteers, with about eight half days of work per year, but that is all it takes. The secret is to cover the ground with horticultural membrane with a decorative layer of either gravel or bark. This suppresses all the weeds except for those which sneak up through the plants. There is no seed sowing, no digging over, no planting out and no watering. Above all there is no need to put it all back to grass to save money because the cost is minute.



Two views of Canal Fields



Paul Crosland, New Committee Member

Paul is a relative newcomer to Berkhamsted, having moved here direct from Holland in 2006, with his Dutch wife, Alexandra, and two children Jasper and Sanne, who are now both at Victoria First School. A chartered quantity surveyor, Paul is a commuter to London, but he values coming home to the calm of Berkhamsted, particularly the towpath walk to and from the station. He says "I like the fact that the town doesn't 'die' in the evenings, and there are all sorts of clubs, activities and meetings taking place. I like to take part in community life where I can, and I would like to see the Citizens Association taking a more proactive role in protecting and improving the town." Paul is a life member of the Ramblers' Association and is taking over leading walks for the BCA from Bill Willett. He hopes to increase the number of walks offered to four per year.

As a member of the 'Friends of Rectory Lane Cemetery', Paul has put in time and effort to improve the access to and the environment of this important green space in the town. Paul has also agreed to take over as Chairman of the BCA's Town Amenities Sub-Committee.



Town Amenities Sub-Committee

Susan Johnson

Sadly, Gordon Bluck has decided to call it a day as a member and Chairman of TASC, as well as leaving the main committee, on the grounds of ill health. We wish him well and hope he will feel able to return at a later date. Meanwhile our new recruit, Paul Crosland, has volunteered to take over; we look forward to his first meeting in charge. TASC has been watching the progress of significant developments, and awaits the outcome of several Appeals. But TASC is not just about planning. We are making representations on the future of the Royal Mail Sorting Office to try to ensure we don't all have to go to HH to retrieve our undelivered parcels when the staff relocate (as well as watching what will happen to the redundant site). We also keep a watching brief on parking (especially at the station), the canal towpath, tree planting, and potholes. And we are already collecting nominations for next year's Environment Award.

BCA Activities

Rita Jones

Not Quite Goodbye!

I ended the Activities section in the last Newsletter with 'Goodbye', forgetting that I still had to tell you about the last talks I organised (and, perhaps, some of you missed).

'Tales of a Tour Manager' 10th February

On a gloomy February evening, how wonderful to be reminded of holidays, past and to come, in the pictures of the European countries explored by Brian Johnson on the rail tours he manages. What a good idea, it might seem, to be paid to go on holiday! But from Brian's amusing stories it is clear it is not very relaxing, and he certainly earns his keep. An entertaining evening.

'An Evening of Antiques' 14th April

Stephen Hearn of Tring Market Auctions briefly introduced himself with his life history and information about the Auctions. Then he turned to the serious business of the evening, looking at and discussing all the 'treasures' we had brought. Our appetites had been whetted by tales of these old things found in an attic or shed which were sold for thousands. Sadly, none of our 'treasures' reached these dizzy heights, but many of us learnt something new about the things that had been part of the family or we had bought because we liked them. Stephen's knowledge was impressive, and is available, together with those of his expert colleagues, at Tring Market Auctions, should you want to know more about your other intriguing treasures.

Now this is 'Goodbye' to the Activities column as well. It was a very good 'final' year, with high attendances, starting with about 150 for Richard Mabey and averaging 60 at the other talks. It was a very satisfying end to 10 years of talks, walks,

Christmas celebrations and a Garden Party. I was delighted to be given a life membership of BCA at the AGM and thank you all for that and for your support over the years.

Not Quite Hello!

Katy Brookes-Duncan

I'm taking over from Rita, who is providing invaluable support during the transition. I organised the recent the debate on the alternative vote and hustings for the Borough and Town Council elections and. Our thanks go to David Gauke MP and Christopher Townsend for leading the debate and to the local candidates who explained why we should vote for them. We had a much smaller audience than for the General Election hustings yet the local councils more directly impact on our standard of living. Why don't people get more involved locally and how can we encourage them to? Answers on a postcard?

Membership Counts

Christopher Talbot-Ponsonby

A big welcome to our 3 new members who have joined since the last newsletter. They include: one that joined having seen our form in the New Home Owners Welcome Pack and two on a recommendation from an existing member. This means our membership is 399, three down from our last newsletter. Twenty eight years ago our membership was 454, rising to 611 by 1995, before falling back. A sign of the times?

As we have consistently said "Joining is not just going to meetings, or receiving newsletters, but it is to help us have an influence in having a say." It is therefore very important that we maintain our membership to maintain our influence.

Thank you to the 188 members who have paid as a result of the renewal notice enclosed with the December Newsletter. There are currently 23 members with outstanding subscriptions. If you are one of them, a reminder will be enclosed with this newsletter. Please rejoin! Or encourage a new member by sending me £5 along with their name and address: 15 Shrublands Avenue HP4 3JH Tel: 865882

Views expressed are not necessarily those of the Association.

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