

*The
Dorking
and
District
Preservation
Society
Newsletter*

MARCH 1990

NO. 1

DORKING AND DISTRICT
PRESERVATION SOCIETY

President: Mr Gordon Lee-Steere DL
Chairman: Mr C.B.Carr MA

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

I congratulate the Society on its initiative in producing this Newsletter. I hope that you will read the various articles and news included. If this is anything to go by, I believe the Newsletter will become a very useful and interesting source of information for local people and organisations. Maybe you will feel inspired to pen a contribution for the next issue.

EDITORIAL

We aim in this new publication to keep members and other interested parties in touch with the activities of the Society and to record its reactions to current developments. At the turn of the year we wrote to all the parish councils and seventeen residents' and village associations in our area inviting them to make use of the Newsletter, should they so wish, to give a wider airing to matters of particular interest or concern. We are delighted to be able to include, in this issue, contributions from the Westcott Village Association and the Lowfield Heath Windmill Trust. By the next issue we hope to have news from other quarters

A second aim is to stir up more interest and concern about our local heritage and environment, which the Society exists to preserve. To that end, these Editorials will sometimes, if not regularly, propound and discuss issues that affect Dorking and its villages and countryside. We shall write provocatively in the hope of arousing comments and reactions from readers, which will be published, subject to space considerations and provided of course that they are not libellous or obscene. It must however be emphasised that the the views expressed in this part of the Newsletter are the Editor's own and are not necessarily officially endorsed by the Society, though it seems likely that the two will not be far apart.

In Dorking we have much to treasure and safeguard but it is sad that so many who live here or pass through are quite careless of the appearance of the town and its surroundings. In particular it is depressing to see how much litter there is, not so much in the town centre, which is still reasonably well cleaned by the authorities, but on the immediate outskirts.

This is of course a national problem, nor is it a new one. The current number of the History Group Journal, *Dorking History** reproduces an extract from *The Dorking Advertiser* of 1904 which, in passing, notices the mess of discarded paper around a seat in Westcott Road. But in the last two or three decades this environmental pollution has steadily grown very much worse, thanks to the growth of the packaging industry, the proliferation of "fast food" chains and last but not least, a general decline in public expenditure on street and public path cleaning, for reasons not unconnected with central Government policies (which you may or may not support).

But who makes the litter? Two of the main culprits appear to be school children (who, it would seem, are not in general taught civic pride and tidiness by their parents or by their educators); and motorists (who take such fierce pride in their cars that as soon as they have finished a confectionery bar, cigarette packet or canned drink, they throw the packaging out of the window). The passage of fast motor traffic acts like a giant broom, sweeping all this rubbish from the road surface on to the verges and footpaths.

Some of the worst areas for litter in Dorking are therefore to be found along the verges of the A24 and A25 and within walking distance of the schools, fast food shops and other places where sweets and canned drinks are sold. The footways and verges between Ashcombe School and the two adjacent railway stations are a real black spot and, it must be said, a blind spot with the local authority, which thinks one litter bin is enough in this vulnerable area. You will know of others.

More effort on the part of the responsible council officials and councillors is certainly required; we know funds are a problem but at least they might scrape up a few pounds for more containers where the evil is at its worst. They could also think constructively about the present practice of allowing their grass verge mowers to chew up the rubbish and redistribute it rather than suck it up and take it away.

In the longer term, the onus is on the citizen to set an example to others. On parents and other relatives, scout and guide and other youth leaders and teachers to show youngsters the merits of tidiness outside the home and school as well as within. After all no-one throws rubbish down on the floor at home in the unthinking way they do in the train or along the footpaths (even within a few feet of a bin).

We can all do something: if you regularly walk a path that is subject to litter and neglected by the council, it is no great effort to carry a plastic bag and pick up at least the smaller items as you go, taking it home or placing it in a convenient bin. The same process can be followed when walking in the woodlands and countryside. If more of us did this it would become noticeable and acceptable socially; it would encourage others at the moment too timid to take even such a small initiative, or thinking it beneath their dignity.

* Any member of the Society may receive *Dorking History* twice a year and participate in the Local History Group's other activities on payment of £1 a year to Cliff Weight, 4 Hillside Close, Brockham, RH3 7ES (Betchworth 2956).

Readers are invited to write to the Editor expressing their views on the Newsletter generally or on particular local issues. In this way members

of the Society may take part in the democratic process and guide the officers of the Society in their counsels.

Please note last date for copy for next issue: 4 August 1990.

ALAN A. JACKSON

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

We were all very pleased when Alan Jackson agreed to edit a Newsletter. It is certainly time that the Society had a regular means of communication between its Council and members and a place where we can let other Societies know what we are doing and reproduce contributions from them.

I resist the temptation to turn this into a Chairman's letter telling you about the many things the Society is doing. In my first year as Chairman I have been both surprised and pleased to discover the scope of the work being done on our behalf by so many dedicated people. It is natural for a Society such as ours to look back to times past and in "preserving", we must inevitably at times be saying "no" to what others may regard as progress.

Nonetheless much of what we do is forward looking. Who would question that in giving the town a Museum and a Library of local information we are fulfilling a need in the community. In the same way the very success of its publications and its meetings speak of the public appreciation of the work of the Local History Group. Instances of the positive work of the main Society are footpath clearance, seeking a rational answer to our traffic problems, putting up a plaque to Lord Olivier, advising on the Town Centre Improvement Scheme, organising a Best Development Award and commenting constructively and regularly on many planning applications and appeals.

We hope in the months to come to concentrate on getting the work of the Society better known both to our members and to those outside who may be persuaded to join. Our Membership Secretary, David Harding, has been working to ensure the published total is a realistic figure and it has indeed increased this year. But we do need the help and encouragement of more members. The larger our membership (now 750), the more we can expect others to listen to what we have to say. Please do what you can to help - there is nothing like a personal approach - and please let us have your views, either direct or through the Editor.

Finally, I take the opportunity of thanking all who have done so much for the Society in the past year. I will not attempt to name names, except to thank Martin Harmar, an exemplary Treasurer for so many years, and to welcome Martin Wedgwood as his successor.

LOWFIELD HEATH WINDMILL

There are at least 50 post mills remaining in Britain, only a few of them capable of working in the traditional fashion. In Surrey there is at present only one in operating order (at Outwood, TQ 328456) but thanks to sterling volunteer efforts there will soon be a second, at Charlwood.

The ruthless environmental blight and visual ugliness of Gatwick Airport has long since overwhelmed the little rural community of Lowfield Heath, once part of the parish of Charlwood, leaving only its church and 250-year old post mill surrounded by noise and modern development. Threatened with steady deterioration and ruin if left on its original site, the mill has been the subject of a remarkable rescue operation that has attracted commendation and support from the Science Museum and the Shell "Better Britain" campaign.

In the summer of 1987 the building was moved en bloc to a field at Russ Hill, Charlwood (TQ 235408), a relocation which enabled it legally to benefit from the financial help of the Thomas Alexander Mason Trust. Careful restoration and re-erection has since proceeded successfully and by last September, the basic structure was standing on its new site. Weatherboarding of the sides began in the following month. Many large tasks however still remain: the second pair of sails (for which there is at present insufficient funds); the roundhouse roof and floor; the skirt to the weatherboarding; the ladder; the landscaping of the site; the internal floor-boarding; the brakewheel; and then the machinery. All this depends on more funds coming in and on volunteers, skilled and semi-skilled, offering their time.

An Opening Ceremony will be held on Tuesday afternoon 10 April 1990. Mrs Jean Shelley, 4 Norwood Hill Road, Charlwood, RH6 0ED (0293 862646) will happily provide further information on this event, welcome any offers of voluntary help and gratefully accept donations.

BEST DEVELOPMENT COMPETITION

The Society is to make one award each year, in the form of a written certificate for the best development in Dorking and the southern part of the Mole Valley area. The first award will be selected from buildings or developments completed in the year ended March 1990 and the judging will take place this summer. Such factors as imaginative and efficient use of the site, relationship to immediate surroundings, to the landscape and to the townscape; use of materials; and overall contribution to enhancement of character of Dorking and district will be taken into account. The MVDC and the Dorking Advertiser are also participating in this initiative.

LOSING THE WAY TO GUILDFORD

Have you ever wondered why all references to Guildford were several years ago removed from all half dozen or so signboards around the Givons Grove roundabout between Dorking and Leatherhead? This little ploy was thought up by Mole Valley Area Highways Sub-Committee, which includes representatives from the Mole Valley District Council and the Surrey County Council, the aim apparently being "to encourage drivers in the vicinity of Leatherhead to go to Guildford via the M25/A3 route rather than the A246". Equally it also led many to seek Guildford via Dorking and the A25, perhaps thinking there was some obstruction on the obvious direct route via A246. And of course the M25 cannot in any case be used by all vehicles and all drivers, nor are all drivers happy to use the motorways.

In October 1988 the Westcott Village Association thought it had got this strange decision reversed. Or so it seemed; but there was the usual bureaucratic delay, with a second round of discussion on the Sub-Committee. At last, in August 1989, one sign was restored, on the northbound carriageway of the A24; but those on the southbound approaches were left without the "Guildford" indication. No costly manufacturing work seems to be involved in this omission, just bureaucratic constipation. The Surrey Society has now weighed in alongside the WVA. They have been told that the other signs will be changed by the end of 1990. Watch those spaces!

OLIVIER PLAQUE

Although he never remembered much about them, the late Lord Laurence Olivier, spent the first days of his long life at 26 Wathen Road, Dorking, where he was born on 22 May 1907. His father was the Rev, Gerard Olivier, a curate at St Martin's Church. The Society has arranged for a suitable plaque to be erected on the wall of the house and it is hoped that this will be unveiled, perhaps by Lady Olivier (the actress Joan Plowright), on 22 May 1990.

RETURN OF THE PUNCHBOWL

The Society has been concerned about the disappearance of the ancient name of the Punchbowl Inn since this building has been taken over by the 'Little Chef' organisation. It is pleasing to report that the owners have indicated that a suitable sign may soon be restored.

DONATED SEATS

There are a number of seats in and around Dorking that have been donated for public use at viewpoints, and other sites, in memory of past residents, some of them stalwarts of this Society. Over the years some of these practical memorials have fallen into disrepair and in at least one case (near Deepdene Terrace) have been all but overwhelmed by vigorous growth of bushes and young trees. A comprehensive record of these seats is being drawn up and inspection will be carried out to ascertain where repairs or replacement are necessary.

LATE SPRING WALK

On Sunday 13 May (meet Dukes Head Brockham Green, 14.00) Cliff Weight will lead a Society Walk from Brockham to Betchworth. Victoria Houghton will indicate buildings of interest en route. Please notify your intention of coming and say whether you require tea (at Brockham Church) by dropping a note marked "Spring Walk" in the Museum letterbox, West Street.

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