

*The
Dorking
and
District
Preservation
Society
Newsletter*

3

MARCH 1991

DORKING AND DISTRICT
PRESERVATION SOCIETY

President: Mr Gordon Lee-Steere DL
Chairman: Mr C.B.Carr MA
Editor: Mr Alan A. Jackson FRSA
St Michael's Steps,
Deepdene Park Road,
Dorking RH5 4AN ((0306) 883324)

EDITORIAL

THERE have been several vague reports recently in *The Dorking Advertiser*, each adorned with the extra-large sensational headlines of which that newspaper is so fond, about the possibility of the increased usage of the east-west railway, particularly for freight, following the opening of the Channel Tunnel in two years' time. BR denies the existence of any definite plans and has stated that the proposed third-rail electrification of this line (now postponed following a sharp deterioration in Network SouthEast's financial situation) is related to the existing passenger services and not Channel Tunnel traffic.

Nevertheless it is highly probable that this question will be a live one before very long. The Channel Tunnel is a very much a reality, well on course for completion, and it is safe to predict that it will generate new through rail traffic between Britain and Europe. The old ferries, burdened with heavy safety expenditure after the Zeebrugge disaster, face an uncertain future. The point that affects us is that an important proportion of this Tunnel rail traffic will be related to places outside the south east and London. Sooner, rather than later, Bristol, South Wales and the West Country are going to demand a direct rail link with the Tunnel, avoiding London, which our line can provide (although a flyover must be made at Redhill and some alterations may be required through Guildford). Indeed, calls of this type have already been heard. By making fairly simple layout changes at Reading, the line through Dorking might also form part of a route between the Tunnel and the Midlands, By-passing London

This will mean pressure for our line to be upgraded for freight and fast passenger working, whatever BR may say now. And it is a possibility which will not be welcomed by those who live near the railway, since they will fear more noise and also greater use at night.

We need to think carefully about this. An upgraded railway may be the lesser of two evils. Rail noise is intermittent and quick to fade, with long spaces of silence between. Personal experience of living for some years less than 100 metres from a busy line shows that the brain becomes so accustomed to it that it tends to be ignored after a time. Upgrading work on the line through our area should have virtually no effect on the

environment, since it would consist primarily of rebuilding the track along its existing course; and conductor rail electrification, the method likely to be employed, is quite unobtrusive.

If a highly vocal "NIMBY" campaign against upgrading and more intensive use of the railway is organised, should we give it any support it may request? We can be sure that the national media would take it up, since experience shows they make a far more frenzied fuss about new railway works (witness Daily Telegraph coverage of the Direct Channel Tunnel Link through Kent) than about new motorways (even in Kent!). Such a campaign might eventually force any plans for improving our line to be dropped. But would that be the end of the matter?

It is not so long ago that the road planners threatened us with a fine new motorway to relieve the A25. This was to run from Brockham, we recall, across Pixham and then west, below the Ranmore escarpment and close to the railway, as far as Gomshall. The inadequacy of an unimproved Redhill-Reading railway to deal with the through tunnel traffic would lead to such traffic coming off rail at the Folkestone Terminal and passing through our area to the west and Wales by road (modern "piggyback" techniques make it easy to run fully-loaded road trucks on and off railway trains). The M25 might take some of it, but much seems likely to be frustrated by M25 congestion, trying to find its way by alternative routes, soon creating an outcry for new roads. You can be sure the Department of [Road] Transport would be only too willing to oblige. Those old plans for an A25 relief road would be as nothing compared to the great new road through our area towards Guildford and beyond that they would be delighted to produce at the taxpayers' expense. The only debate for the road engineers and planners might well be on whether it should pass close to Dorking or along the south side of the Greensand ridge below Holmwood and Leith Hill.

Is that what we want?

AAJ

DEEPDENE GARDEN

There is little positive to report on this. It seems unlikely that Kuoni, the present owners, will fund any work at present. The proposed building works have been dropped and with them the planning gain promise of restoration of the garden for public access. The Society has however made known its continuing and active interest in this important matter.

CHURCHYARD EAST WALL

The developers of St Martin's Walk will replace the old wall with a low one topped by railings to allow the church to be seen from their new courtyard. It is hoped that salvaged dressed stone and flint from the old wall will be used.

DORKING MUSEUM NOTES

The MVDC are now proposing to give financial support for three years to a County Museum Development Officer Post.

The Working Party have repainted the exterior of the Museum and cleared up the yard.

Recent acquisitions include: Unexploded bomb notice, World War 2*: Bow saw*; Dorking County Grammar School cap band and house badge; c 1950 globe shaped TV; glazed stone wc pedestal c 1900; model tinplate motor car c 1920*; mid-Victorian sunglasses*; framed photo of Dorking County Grammar School pupils and staff 1936 (also unframed photos 1938 and 1964 and 1924 pupils at Dorking High School for Girls); World War 1 dedication plaque from South Street bandstand*; manual shoe stitching machine with instructions for use and a cottager's foot last*; two portable battery radios c 1950*; passport dated 1881. [* denotes on display]

The number of visitors for 1990 was not as high as 1989 but private parties from schools, youth groups and adult associations were a strong feature. Additional openings for the latter placed extra work on our willing Secretary, Miss E Clear, without whom we could not function so efficiently.

The library was extensively used in 1990 and this is much facilitated by the comprehensive index maintained by Miss Doris Mercer. A set of Dorking Parish Magazines was received, covering the years from July 1964. We would very much welcome copies from earlier years, particularly any issues between 1907 and June 1964.

There is a need for someone with artistic flair to help with exhibit displays. Perhaps you know of just the person? Please contact Lionel Green (Arundel House, Willow Green, North Holmwood (0306 883038) if you do.

It is hoped that the purpose-built store for the museum will be completed at North Holmwood during this year.

Names for new stewards at the Museum are still required, some of our older stalwarts would appreciate a rest! Please contact Lionel Green as above.

BROCKHAM BRIDGE

This bridge is becoming unsafe. The SCC have no intention of widening it when making the necessary repairs.

PUBLIC SEATS

The Society's survey of the condition of donated public seats in the area is making good progress. So far 189 have been surveyed.

LOCAL HISTORY GROUP NEWS

It has been agreed by the Executive Committee that members of the Local History Group resident outside the Mole Valley area and not attending meetings should be relieved of the obligation to subscribe to the D & D Preservation Society, paying a Group subscription only.

Vivien Ettliger, Brian Overell and Alan Jackson are well advanced in their prepararion of a new book which will cover the history of Dorking

town from the earliest times to the present day. It is hoped to have this ready for sale later this year, or at latest early in 1992, the Local History Group's Silver Jubilee Year.

Dorking History No. 5, published at the same time as this Newsletter, will contain news of the exciting discovery of evidence of a Roman highway turned up by the St Martin's Walk excavations.

Do you want to learn more about Dorking's past? Society members (and those thinking of joining the Society) who wish to participate in local history activities should contact Cliff Weight at 4 Hillside Close, Brockham RH3 7ES (973 2956). Young people are especially welcome.

THE VILLAGES VIDEO

Over 130 copies of the new video on Dorking's Villages have been sold. We have to meet a target of 200 to break even. This highly watchable account of the villages around Dorking, with a mellifluous commentary by Victoria Houghton, is on sale at the West Street Museum counter (Wednesday and Thursday afternoons and all day Saturdays) for £15. Copies of the video of the town are also still on sale.

BEST DEVELOPMENT AWARD

This was given for the Neo-Vernacular office building on the site of the 1895 magistrates' court in the High Street. The presentation was made by our President at our October 1990 meeting. The architects (Michael Lyell Associates) and representatives of the freeholders (Hearts of Oak Benefits Society) were present.

SPRING RAMBLE

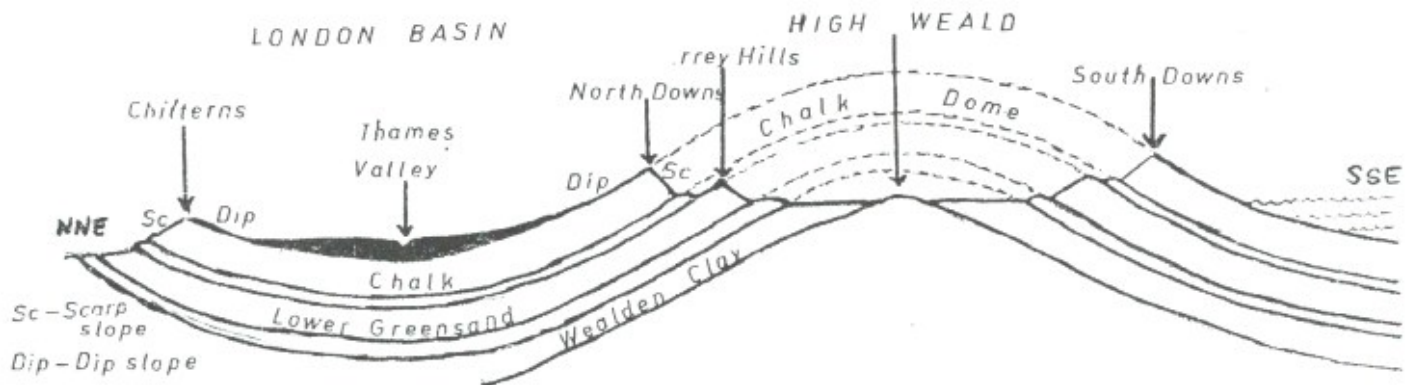
Join Lionel Green for the Society's Spring Walk (not too onerous). Meet at National Trust Car Park (junction of Ranmore Road and Ranmore Common Roads) at 14.15 on Whit Sunday 19 May. Tea will be served at Ranmore Church.

OLD FOSSILS REST IN DORKING MUSEUM

We have in our Museum many unique treasures and this Newsletter will be a useful medium to impart information on some of them in a way which will be of general interest to readers and also of use to stewards in passing on information to visitors.

A discussion on sea fossils may not seem the most inspiring topic to begin with, but the story is nevertheless fascinating. Fossils were formed by layers of mud entombing creatures before they decomposed. The weight of the layers above squeezed out remaining liquids, and both bones and mud were turned into stone. Most of the fossils in the cabinet in the Upper Room at West Street date from the later years of the Cretaceous Era, 75-65 million years ago. From them we learn that the area where we now live was once under the sea. About 20 million years ago the sea beds were rumbled by earth movements that buckled to form the Swiss Alps. A huge dome of chalk covered south east England and this, over further

millions of years was worn by wind, rain, rivers and ice, exposing a series of hills and vales of chalk, sand and clays. Thus were formed the chalk Downs, which preserved the sea creatures of the Cretaceous period - a name derived from the latin word meaning "chalky".



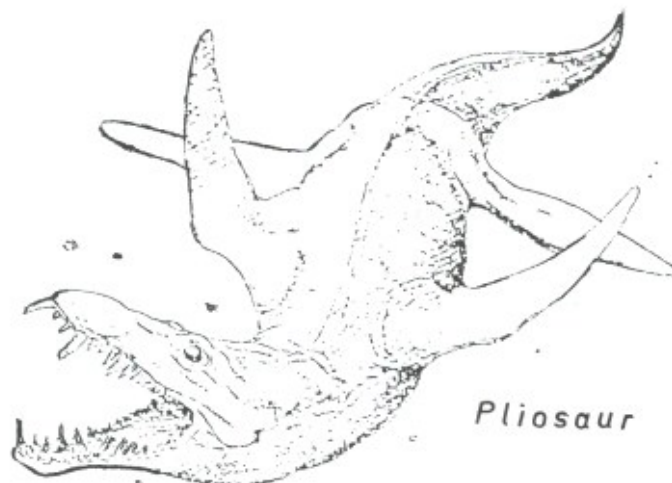
The dotted lines indicate the original upfold of the rocks before erosion took place

Our collection of several hundred fossils came from Henry Cubitt, Second Lord Ashcombe (1867-1947), and most we believe, were found in the Dorking chalk pits he owned. Their importance is such that some have been loaned to the Geological Survey in London and Keyworth (Notts), the Natural History Museum, Birkbeck College and Leeds University.

One of the sea creatures represented in our collection is the pliosaur, of which we possess the upper cranium, parts of the lower jaw and several teeth. These creatures had large heads with powerful muscles acting on the lower jaw, the jaws having a wide gape to enable most other marine life of the time to be devoured. The teeth had a ridged enamelled surface proportionately longer and more slender and planted in distinct sockets. One is three and a half inches in length. From the size of the upper cranium (2ft 6ins) it has been determined that the total length was about 12 feet. Our main exhibit also shows the site of an upper temporal opening which held a "third eye".

This creature's main means of propulsion were four large paddles which acted like the wings of a penguin, flapping more than rowing, but with an ability to use them as hydrofoils, generating a lift force. Because they had large lungs, and thus great buoyancy, pliosaurus swallowed pebbles for ballast. This action assisted in stabilising the creature like the keel of a boat and also assisted it to drag large prey under water to drown them.

LEG



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Sir, You wrote an excellent editorial article [about litter] in our Newsletter No. 1 and this encouraged correspondence in No. 2 and other interest. Members will like to know that the Council is looking for ways in which the Society can make a worthwhile response.

With this in mind, we contacted the local Council. The position is that we are in the middle of one of those local government reorganisations which look fine on paper, but which do not inevitably lead to greater efficiency and quality of service. The positive thing about the present change is that responsibility for litter will be taken over by Mole Valley District Council so that we shall be dealing with our local officials. The Council will be expected to look to the private sector and so, for instance, street cleaning will be let on a contract from January 1992.

While all this is going on, it is not easy to know how best we can help and how best to use our limited resources. We shall keep in close touch with the Council and will let members know as the situation develops.

C B CARR, CHAIRMAN OF THE SOCIETY

NEW BUILDINGS IN OLD SETTINGS

It was good to see so many members at our Autumn Meeting. We were lucky to have such an excellent illustrated talk by ex-Dorking resident and Past President of the RIBA, Michael Manser.

Prince Charles has had much press coverage for his views and it was refreshing to have a different approach. This is not the place to enter into the Modernist, Post Modernist, Post Classical etc. dispute, interesting though that might be. It is however worth emphasising some of the points made.

We were reminded of the difficulty in any age of making value judgements on the work of contemporary architects; "hostile reaction to new buildings is the norm", said Mr Manser. Horace Walpole found Vanburgh's Blenheim Palace "execrable" and Lord Torrington called Hawksmoor's Neston "a great staring unpleasant dwelling". It is easier to get contemporary approval for "in-keeping" restoration, which so often demeans a great building.

Mr Manser suggested that in the past there was no notion that buildings should be in-keeping with those built earlier, showing splendid slides of such places as St Mark's Square in Venice, Hampton Court and Nash Terraces as well as ordinary street scenes, to demonstrate his thesis. In his view new buildings in old settings must be perceivably new. So much for our Best Development Award given a few minutes earlier!

Careful selection of the architect, use of new materials and techniques and not too much power to planning officers is an unfair condensation of Mr Manser's views. It did seem to me that if we had trusted this theory in Dorking, the unscrupulous and the penny-pinchers would have taken advantage of us over the years.

These are only a few moments from a wide-ranging, provocative, fascinating and well-illustrated talk. I enjoyed it enormously, not least the examples of his own work, shown by the speaker. He certainly made us think. Let me finish with some remarks taken from Sir John Summerson's *Heavenly Mansions* (1947), quoted by Mr Manser to emphasise his view that the conservation movement has gone too far. Sir John proposed that only the very best should be kept, using these criteria:

1. The building which is a work of art, the product of a distinct and outstanding creative mind.
2. The building which is not a distinct creation in this sense but possesses in a pronounced form the characteristic virtues of the school of design which produces it.
3. The building which, of no great artistic merit, is either of significant antiquity or a composition of fragmentary beauties welded together in the course of time.
4. The building which has been the scene of great events or the labours of great men.
5. The building whose virtue is that in a tract of modernity it alone gives depth in time.

In Dorking we have so often opted for mediocrity rather than risk disaster. I think I know what Mr Manser would say of us if he were not too polite to speak his mind. But is he right? CBC

PLANNING APPRAISAL IN 1990

During 1990 our Planning Appraisal Committee under the chairmanship of Owen Russ and comprising Brian Hodges, David Loram and Bill Merry, considered on our behalf some 700 Planning Applications to Mole Valley District Council, including appeal cases. Comment is only made where it is felt to be of real importance so that we do not get a reputation for crying wolf. This means that the ones where we do comment are likely to be the most controversial. It is good to be able to report that on about three quarters of the applications the decision was in line with our representations. CBC

In relation to this subject, it is of interest to record that there have been several successes recently in London in enforcing adherence to old covenants made when land was first sold for building development, thus defeating planning proposals which would result in increases in density of building in residential areas protected by such covenants (vide *The Daily Telegraph* 16 January 1991). There are several estates in Dorking where the number of houses which may be built per acre or on specific plots is defined in such old covenants and recorded in house deeds; one suspects that in some cases at least, these have been contravened by recent "infilling". Let us be vigilant!
 Editor

Published by the Dorking & District Preservation Society.
 Hon. Secretary, Peter Hawkes, 15 Yew Tree Road, Dorking RH4 1ND.
 NEWSLETTER No 3.