

*The
Dorking
and
District
Preservation
Society
Newsletter*

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SEPTEMBER 1991

DORKING AND DISTRICT
PRESERVATION SOCIETY

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EDITORIAL

FORTUNATE as we are to live in such beautiful surroundings and still have about us in Dorking and its villages much that should be valued as man-made heritage, it is an increasingly hard task to infuse a sense of civic pride in this precious environment to the extent of ensuring its protection and seeing that necessary improvements are carried through. Councillors and the local MP need to be constantly reminded of our concerns in these matters.

At the present time the problem of securing amenity improvements is made worse by the unprecedented restraints on local authority expenditure. This explains to a large extent the neglect of the once beautiful Deepdene Terrace and Glory Woods - both gifted to the people of Dorking and fully a MVDC responsibility. Storm damage in recent years has only served to exacerbate what was already a serious lack of regular amenity management at both locations.

Private owners are also affected by the present economic recession and in any case may need to be stimulated into attending to their responsibilities to the local community. Below the Deepdene Terrace, the once beautiful Deepdene Garden yearly grows into a greater wilderness. It is an undeniable part of Dorking's heritage, redolent with historical associations; a caring local authority would have bought it from a no doubt willing vendor years ago. Nowadays such a move is hardly practical politics, but could not the District and County Councils organise a joint sponsorship of young volunteers to undertake clearance and restoration work under professional supervision, with the ultimate objective of securing public access to the restored garden? The Deepdene could be another Painshill or Claremont on a smaller scale. There might also be scope for volunteers to work in similar fashion on restoring the Glory and the Deepdene Terrace. Perhaps we should be stirring our councillors to take an interest in a low cost restoration of all these important local amenities; or are we happy to see all three revert to ever more impassable jungle?

Protection and improvement of amenity is not always a matter of spending money. Questionable planning decisions are still being made

at the expense of the beauty of our surroundings, even if the low period of the 1950s and 1960s planning approvals for urban tower blocks, arid office barracks and demolition of historic buildings in our area is thankfully behind us. Walk up towards the Glory from St Paul's Road or South Terrace and you will encounter the stark outcome of planning consents for the residential development of the old Harrowlands estate. An unwelcome outcrop of high density suburban type housing now extends right up to the very edge of the wood, with little or no tree-planting evident to hide or soften the result. What was once a pretty woodland footpath from South Terrace is now bordered by urban fencing, with little houses pushing up close behind.

Tree planting is much-needed here and in several other locations. In 1932-33, with full support from the District Council, this Society was instrumental in placing carefully chosen trees along the eastern approach to Dorking either side of the cemetery. Now almost all those trees have disappeared, whilst most of the survivors are damaged. The amenity value of this area is currently threatened by a plan to construct a "service" road to accommodate parked cars, to which it seems planning consent will be forthcoming if it has not already been given. Trees will then be needed more than ever to hide the cars. Perhaps the provision of new trees in Reigate Road is something the Society might tackle in coordination with the local authority; who knows, as in the early 1930s, there may even be grants available from national amenity bodies.

Sometimes amenity damage occurs from lack of activity within existing budgets and responsibilities. It is apparent for example that in Dorking the police tend to cast a blind eye at the parking of motor vehicles on roadside grass verges. This illegal practice, regularly occurring in Deepdene Avenue, not only damages a valuable amenity but can be hazardous for drivers and pedestrians, whose sight lines are thus obstructed. Cotmandene offers another example in this category. No consistent attempt is made to control the growing amount of indiscriminate all-day parking gradually creeping like a rash all over this area as car commuters into Dorking desperately try to avoid parking charges that are a fair cost of their daily activities. Cotmandene already has too many tracks usable by cars and the council has recently surfaced another, which will encourage further car movement and pollution over what should be a visual and recreational amenity.

There is much that we as individuals can do about these and similar attacks on our amenities. For a start, we can bring more friends and neighbours into our Society. There is a serious need to at least double our membership and also to lower our average membership age. The tiny proportion of the adult population that our total membership represents and possibly the nature of the membership, can rightly or wrongly tempt politicians, councillors and council officials to dismiss us as a minority pressure group. In short, the Society needs to develop what is crudely called in some circles more "clout"

And perhaps we should have more discussion of sensitive local amenity issues at our general meetings. This would generate publicity and, combined with a wider membership, make it easier when it might be useful to do so, to invite the local MP and Council Chairman to such

meetings and be confident that they will not find it so easy, as they have perhaps done in the past, to excuse themselves.

Secondly we can, each one of us, instead of remaining apathetic and silent, continuously voice our individual amenity concerns to our MP, to local political party officials and to County and District councillors, not least when these activists come round to seek our votes. The Society is of course ready to advise and help if needed and would be glad to know of new local amenity problems as they arise.

By joining the Society - even by reading this as a non-member, you have shown your interest in amenity protection and improvement. But that alone is not enough; the hardworking officials of the Society need your support and active participation, the year round.

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NEW OFFICERS APPOINTED

Mr Barry Collins, well-known for his stalwart work for the Dorking & District Rail Users' Association, which he helped to found, has been appointed the Society's Public Relations and Publicity Officer. He has already contributed an article to *The Dorking Advertiser* on the litter problem.

Mr Donald Mansfield is the new Footpaths & Bridleways Officer and Mr Michael Beggs the Membership Development Officer.

THE PUNCHBOWL INN / LITTLE CHEF

The Society is still trying to have the old name of this establishment, which dates back to 1780, restored at least for external display. At the moment the owning company is pleading an insufficiency of funds for what must be minimal expenditure.

TOWN TRAILS LEAFLET

It has been agreed that the 14 year-old leaflets should be replaced, possibly with one or two revised routes instead of the present four. Work on this is being coordinated by Edwin Sykes (7 Upper Rose Hill, 886130) in conjunction with the Local History Group. Suggestions and ideas would be welcomed and those who do not have copies of the existing leaflets will find them in Dorking Museum's shop.

DONATED PUBLIC SEAT SURVEY

All the survey forms have now been completed and a report has been issued to SCC, MVDC, parish councils and village associations as a "consultation paper", seeking comments and corrections. The survey has been entered in the SCC "Pride of Place" competition.

LITTER AND OTHER POLLUTION

The Society has offered to meet the cost of two litter bins in the Willow Walk area at a total outlay of £240.

As members will have seen in *The Dorking Advertiser* in June, the responsibility for waste and litter collection in the Mole Valley area now rests entirely with the Mole Valley District Council. Transitional arrangements will last until the end of 1991 after which all services will be let out on competitive tenders subject to strict service standards.

Under the new legislation members of the public (ie YOU) have the right to make complaints to the Mole Valley District Council where the service is seen to be unsatisfactory. If no corrective action is taken after a complaint has been made, the complaint can be formally registered at the local Magistrates' Court (conveniently located near the Council Offices!) after giving the Council five days' notice of the intention to lodge such a formal complaint.

We hope all our members will be vigilant in pointing out areas where litter is left uncollected so that the Council may have the opportunity to act. We look forward amongst other things to noticeable improvement along the verges of the A24 and A25 at the edge of Dorking and the approaches to the main and Deepdene railway stations where at present schoolchildren have no bins to use for their drink cans and sweet papers.

PLANNING OBJECTIONS

Some 800 applications have been vetted by your hardworking team so far this year; those calling for comment by the Society may be summarised as follows:

Boring for hydrocarbons (i.e. oil) adjacent to HEADLEY HEATH Reservoir, Boxhill Road (refused); Development of land (47 hectares) at LOWFIELD HEATH, London Road, Crawley as business, storage and distribution park and leisure and recreation centre; Erection of 47 houses and 9 and 18 hole golf courses and clubhouse, Shellwood Manor Estate, Millwood Lane NEWDIGATE (former Schermuly factory) -- 38 houses only allowed, golf courses to be dealt with later; Demolition of two houses at IFIELD for erection of a 100 bed hotel (refused); advertising fascias over shops at 242, 250-254 and 342 HIGH STREET DORKING thought to be injurious to the character of the building or area, whether by form or colour; Demolition and redevelopment of DORKING BUS GARAGE AND BUS STATION as offices; Permanent access to DENBIES WINERY from A24; Demolition of Lonsdale Hall, Lonsdale Road DORKING and redevelopment as offices and "leisure complex". We have also expressed to SCC our general interest in the preservation and minimisation of any damage to the Mole Valley/North Downs environment by mineral exploitation.

BEST DEVELOPMENT COMPETITION

Despite the adverse effects of the current economic recession on new construction there have been eight nominations over a wide spread of developments for this, our second competition. The panel of judges representing the three sponsors of the competition, namely the Mole Valley District Council, *The Dorking Advertiser* and ourselves, will meet to decide the winner during the next few weeks. The trophy will be presented at our Autumn Meeting. The Society is very grateful to the judges, none of whom have very much spare time, for the additional hours they are spending on this task.

DORKING AND DISTRICT MUSEUM

(From notes supplied by Lionel Green and Brian Hodges)

The Museum has applied to register with the Museum & Galleries Commission. This will enhance but not alter its status. Amongst other things, it involves a high standard of competence, documentation, access to professional advice, public facilities, long term stability, approved policies on accession and disposal of exhibits, and adequate storage facilities.

We owe it to the people of our area to provide the best, not only for today but also as a safeguard for the future. The registration will involve sacrifice of time and money but if accepted, will provide access to central funds for grants to help the Museum to reach higher standards. Our documentation and records are already among the best to be found in Surrey's museums.

We have obtained the services of a professional curator, Miss Denise Cutts, who will visit the Museum at least six times a year and attend our committee meetings. Long term stability may be a problem as our present premises are owned by the District Council. But we now have our own store at North Holmwood, completed this year at a cost of £6,248. This is intended as a home for our reserve collection.

With the support of most District Councils, the SCC have appointed a County Museums Development Officer, Miss Wendy Rose. Miss Rose has already visited our Museum and met the curators.

The following are among the more interesting acquisitions since the last report (* indicates on display):

Householders' First Aid case, World War 2 *; Clay pipe bowl found under the floor at Woodcote, Coldharbour Lane and signed by a workman "James Hooker 1869" (this house was built in that year) *; Model of the Knoll, Mill Road, Holmwood, the first home of Biwaters and an engraved brass doorknob from the house *; "Little Maestro" portable radio (by Pilot), c1939 *; a small pewter measuring jug found by the donor's grandfather in a sewer trench near the parish church about 1890 *; a pair of Victorian handmade candle snuffers *; a metal knitting guide (row and stitch counter) c1920 *; World War 2 anti-gas ointment tins (empty) *; Stork margarine World War 2 cookery book *;

World War 2 blood donor card *; World War 2 anti-gas eyeshields and fire watcher's armbands *; framed photos of St Joseph's Priory School, 1957 and 1959 and of Dorking Grammar School 1964; prefect and hat badges, Dorking Grammar School; China teapot with Dorking crest *; Enamelled metal notice prohibiting cycling, Dorking Urban District Council *.

LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

In addition to our monthly meetings in the Friends' Meeting House (19.30 first Tuesday, new members welcome at any meeting), and a splendid outing to Sissinghurst and Knole, the main news is that our history of Dorking town, *Dorking: A Surrey Market Town Through Twenty Centuries* is now being printed at Rayments, Dorking and should be on sale in good time for Christmas. The price will be around £8 and very good value at that - so start saving the pennies for your own copy and for others to send friends and relatives as Christmas gifts!

As reported in somewhat lurid form in *The Dorking Advertiser* ["TOWN HISTORY ROW"], the MVDC decided they would provide £200 towards our very heavy printing and production costs and we are grateful for this generous contribution. The quicker our outlay is recovered, the sooner we can get on with further publications which are in active preparation by our members.

SPRING RAMBLE

The Society's Spring Ramble, ably led by Lionel Green, took a happy group of about 20 members on a leisurely circuit of Ranmore and Denbies which offered some splendid and not too familiar vistas of Box Hill and the Mickleham Gap. We concluded with a welcome cup of tea and sticky cakes in the churchyard of St Barnabas, Ranmore, where we watched a serious group round a grave only to find they were studying lichen. During the walk, our Editor pointed out the mid-Victorian mass-produced galvanised metal estate fencing which still survives, often in surprisingly good order, on the Denbies Estate. Arrangements have subsequently been made for some of the posts to be obtained for the Museum. We also noted that the tree planted by Albert, Prince Consort in 1851 had been lost in the most recent Great Storm, but we have learned that its commemorative plaque is being retained by Mr White at Denbies.

Published by the Dorking & District Preservation Society.
 Hon. Secretary, Peter Hawkes, 15 Yew Tree Road, Dorking RH4 1ND.
 NEWSLETTER No 4.

Surrey Hills

*Sweet Health, I seek thee! hither bring
The balm that softens human ills;
Come, on the long-drawn clouds that fling
Their shadows o'er the Surrey-Hills.
Yon green-topt hills, and far away
Where late as now I freedom stole,
And spent one dear delicious day
On thy wild banks, romantic Mole.*

Ay, there's the scene! beyond the sweep
Of London's congregated cloud,
The dark-brow'd wood, the headlong steep,
And valley-paths without a crowd!
Here, Thames, I watch thy flowing tides,
Thy thousand sails am proud to see;
For where the Mole all silent glides
Dwells Peace, - and Peace is wealth to me!*

ROBERT BLOOMFIELD
1766-1823

* Box Hill and the beautiful neighbourhood of Dorking