

**DORKING & DISTRICT PRESERVATION SOCIETY**



*Established in 1929*

# **NEWSLETTER**

No.8 SEPTEMBER 1993

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*Registered Charity No: 246806*

## DORKING & DISTRICT PRESERVATION SOCIETY

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### EDITORIAL

The response to our request for suggestions as to what concerns the Society might take up on behalf of our membership was not exactly overwhelming but a word of thanks is due to those who did take the trouble to write or to express their views verbally at the Museum or elsewhere.

Our impression (and it may be false) is that many do agree with what has been said here about the ludicrously expensive Norbury Park tunnel solution for a short section of the A24 which simply needs a bit of traffic-calming; with the use of the Redhill-Reading railway for Channel Tunnel freight in preference to more road concrete poured over our precious Surrey countryside; against any enlargement of M25 capacity that will encourage more traffic through the Mole Valley; against any runway and night flight expansion at Gatwick; and against any oil drilling in our area that will put even more traffic on our roads. But an impression is not enough. We must be sure we are reflecting your views and not ignoring other concerns.

Your officers have started to consider this question of communication. So please prepare for this. Should it prove to be the case that the bulk of our now rapidly expanding membership has views which conflict with what Ministers, Councillors and Council officials are proposing as beneficial, either on local or national grounds, we shall be looking to our MP and our Councillors to

express this difference of opinion where it matters - for isn't that what democracy is all about?

One topic that has emerged quite strongly since the last issue of this Newsletter is the ugliness and sheer overwhelming size of the new road signs along the A24. As we look up at these towering sheets of metal littering Deepdene Avenue and the Mickleham Gap, they seem to symbolise the Government's loose purse strings in all matters concerned with road transport, and the ruthless pursuit by the Department of Transport (a real misnomer!) of a policy that appears to envisage supplying new roads without limit and damn the consequences. We may recall that in the last public expenditure round, that Department saw to it that funds for public transport were cruelly slashed whilst its road building programme was protected. On this theme, our Chairman has written to Kenneth Baker MP, asking him to use his influence for a *Transport Policy* as opposed to a *Roads Policy*; similar sentiments have been expressed nationwide, but there is as yet no sign of a change of heart.

For public transport the future looks bleak indeed. It is no secret that your Editor regularly makes good use of the excellent and environmentally-friendly British Rail facilities at Dorking. These serve all four points of the compass and allow the purchase of a through ticket (and reservation if required) to any station in Britain and

Ireland. Anxious about the consequences of the current railway 'privatisation' proposals, he has been in correspondence with Mr. Baker, pointing out the folly of breaking up the present generally efficient and integrated national railway network, demolishing through-ticketing arrangements such as we have at Dorking, reducing the attractions of the one-day London Travelcard and bringing higher fares to what will be a totally fragmented railway system sustained by a costly bureaucracy. However in his most recent letter, Mr. Baker states that he will continue to support the railway legislation now before Parliament.

Returning to our contemplation of those lavish and costly road signs, it is salutary to compare them with the state of our local footpath fingerposts, which (as for example at the junction of Deepdene Avenue and Deepdene Drive) are quite shamefully neglected. Pedestrians of course have few votes but it is noticeable that many other counties do better in this matter. Perhaps after the seat survey we need to initiate a fingerpost survey.

Why, some have asked, are the new road signs so enormous? Yes! you've guessed it - they just wouldn't be readable if they were any smaller, such is the speed of car traffic now (not least along the A24, as some families know to their great sadness). Your Planning Officer has written to the Surrey County Council about the excessive size of these signs but we suspect they are to a national standard evolved at the taxpayers' expense by the ever-busy Whitehall exponents and practitioners of the current road policy. What would the planning departments say if advertising hoardings of similar size were to be erected in the sensitive Surrey countryside? Having rid ourselves of commercial hoardings along our country roads as long ago as the 1930s, we now have these monsters instead. It must be conceded that road transport needs *some* signing, even if it need not be quite so gargantuan,

but is there not an excess of it? At the A24/A25 intersection there is a veritable collection of posts and displays, twenty or more, of many differing shapes and sizes, most of it totally ignored by the passing drivers.

Another new ugliness associated with road traffic is the unremitting speed of the tall, sickly-glowing amber lights. These urban posts have recently penetrated into the almost totally rural section of Deepdene Avenue between Dorking and North Holmwood. Of course they are justified as helping to reduce night accidents; but it is yet one more erosion of the environment demanded by the unremitting growth of motor traffic. To atmospheric pollution, visual pollution and noise pollution, there is now added light-pollution, until virtually nowhere in our Surrey countryside is the night sky free from a ghastly orange glow reflected back from the clouds.

A recent evening visit by the Local History Group to Crawley turned our thoughts away for a while from these present concerns. We found the High Street of this old Sussex town to be much the same in length and origins as that of Dorking, and still, like Dorking, with a good sprinkling of historic buildings. But oh! what a contrast to our own High Street. A great car park in the middle where the road widens out, unsympathetic restorations and additions to the older buildings, nasty 1960s architecture filling gaps, good buildings left neglected, and above all, a host of exceedingly ugly shop frontages and signs, particularly those attached to 'fast food outlets', of which there seemed something of a surfeit. So dear reader, should you ever feel depressed about what you see as changes for the worse in Dorking, do go and take a slow and thoughtful walk along Crawley's High Street, for it will show you what ours might have been like today but for the past efforts of our Society and our Council.

**Alan A. Jackson**

### David Harding (1924-1993)

Members of the Society will be sad to learn of the sudden death on 20 June 1993 of David Harding, our Membership Secretary. David was a lifelong resident of Dorking and received his education at the former Dorking County School, which he left in 1942. He joined the Army, where he reached the rank of Acting Captain.

After demobilisation in 1947, he commenced his banking career with the Bank of Montreal and later joined M. Samuel & Co. Ltd., after qualifying as an Associate of the Chartered Institute of Bankers. Elected a Fellow of the CIB in 1975, David was subsequently appointed assistant director of Hill Samuel Ltd and director of Hill Samuel Securities Ltd and on his retirement in 1986 was a director of Hill Samuel Registrars Ltd.

After his retirement David was quickly recruited as Membership Secretary of the Society and under his efficient guidance membership steadily increased. Shortly before his death it gave him great pleasure to report that the membership had risen to well over 1,000, an all-time record, and the Society owes him a deep debt of gratitude for his unstinting efforts on its behalf. To those who worked closely with David and knew him as a personal friend his presence will be sadly missed and our thoughts go out to Joyce, his widow, and his family, at this sad time.

**Peter Mills**

### A Second Runway at Gatwick - an utterly monstrous proposal

The Society's Council were aghast to learn of the resurrection of the proposal to provide another airport runway at Gatwick. This threat to the environment is the largest the Society has ever had to face and your Council will be opposing it with all the power we can muster.

The impact on the historic village of Charlwood would be devastating. It would be left uninhabitable, with over 500 dwellings destroyed including many listed buildings. The threat to Stanhill and Newdigate is unimaginable, together with the urbanisation of large tracts of land for new roads, housing and supply services.

As an initial step, it is suggested that as many people as possible should write to our M.P., the Rt. Hon. Kenneth Baker, at the House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA. (P.A.M.)

*A note from our Chairman, who is on the Surrey Society Executive, which is*

*chaired by our President: We must fight this, not only to save our area, but to keep this runway right out of the South-East.*

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### The Battle of Vincent Lane

Having lost 18-0 in the Mole Valley District Council Planning Committee, Messrs Wickes went to Appeal and won the right to put a Do-It-Yourself store on the former Johnston Brothers site in Vincent Lane. The council concentrated on the loss of industrial land, the residents on traffic and local environment issues and this Society (your Chairman spent 4½ days at the Inquiry and gave evidence) emphasised the effect on the town and the dangerous precedent set on permission being given.

At our request, Kenneth Baker MP, a member of the Society, wrote to the Inspector saying that in his view the appeal should not be allowed, it being 'very important to keep the character of Dorking as close as possible as it is today'. He also wrote: 'It is going to

require a great deal of vigilance over the coming years to ensure that the uniquely beautiful character of the area is preserved'. Sadly, the Inspector was not convinced.

So what is the result? Not only is the DIY store allowed, but there is already intense development pressure on other land in Vincent Lane for retail 'super-store' projects with associated road 'improvements'. We were right in foreseeing this, but that is little comfort. We have told the local Council it should declare its policy now, and not wait for the Local Plan next year. Please tell us what you think. (C.B.C.)

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### Redhill Airfield Expansion

The Society has written to the Reigate Society offering its support to the campaign against the proposed development of Redhill Airfield. Many if not all the biplanes and microlights that cause offensive noise pollution by nose-diving and buzzing round Box Hill originate from this site and there is no doubt that the already strong flow of noisy light aircraft flying at low altitudes over the Mole Valley would be much augmented if this proposal was realised. Past experience shows that once the facilities are in place, all protests against aircraft noise, from whatever source, are totally futile. (A.A.J.)

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### Planning Decisions

So far this year some 800 proposals have been examined by the Society's team of four, in relation to the preservation of the Metropolitan Green Belt and to the other various policies applying to individual areas. Of the 24 applications on which comment was made, the following are of particular interest:

1. Relocation of car parking at Bury Hill Fisheries (Refused)
2. Housing at Warren Farm, Headley Lane (Refused)
3. Two access points at Gracelands, Rusper Road, Newdigate to facilitate holding of

large outdoor entertainments (Withdrawn)

4. Ranmore Tip: two dry ski slopes; 2-storey clubhouse; drag lift; outdoor mountain cycle track; third lane for turning traffic in Ranmore Road (Undetermined)
5. Use of land south of Horley Road, Charlwood for storage of vintage aircraft and erection of building as Aviation Heritage & Education Centre (Refused)

*The Committee is always pleased to hear of any development which has not yet been approved by the Mole Valley District Council.* (O.R.)

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### Dorking & District Museum Notes

The following items have been acquired since the last Newsletter (\* = on display):

Two local (W. R. Butler) mineral water bottles\*; Ewbank carpet sweeper, c.1920\*; World War II button-polishing stick\*; Stained glass window found in cellars at Dorking Aquatics, West Street; Small pot with Dorking crest, Crediton China, Stoke-on-Trent\*; Seal of the Licensing Justices\*; Old chest from Dorking Magistrates' Court inscribed 'Bench for the Hundred of Wotton\*'; Collection of Victorian and Edwardian greetings cards etc.; Needlework specimen book, 1900-1, worked by Agnes Brevig\*; 'Sunny Jim' doll issued by 'Force' breakfast cereal producers\*; Framed photograph of Dorking Home Guard on parade on the Nower in July 1940\*; Meat tenderiser\*; Black doll\*; Child's plate, c.1920\*; Butter mould with case\*; Queen Victoria Diamond Jubilee cup, 1897\*; Scrubbing board with glass inset\*; Glove button hook\*; Four horse shoes; 'Queen Mary' type umbrella with silver knob\*; The *Highway Code*, September 1946\*. (B.S.H.)

*Lionel Green writes:* Miss Doris Mercer feels that the time has come, after 17 years, to relinquish her duties as Honorary Curator (Library). It is because all has been carefully catalogued, shelved, boxed and indexed up to a high standard, that she has

decided that now is the time to achieve a smooth handover to her successor. She has formed a team of helpers, each specialising in some aspect of the Library - photographs, negatives, press cuttings, donor records, etc. Plans are afoot to ensure that when the Museum is open to the public there is always one Steward available who can use the full potential of the Library to assist enquirers and researchers. As a source of information on our local history our Museum Library is second to none and much of this is due to Doris; the Society is heavily indebted to her and there will always be a warm welcome when she calls to renew acquaintances.

The memorial tributes to Ethel Clear and John Walker are now on public display and all contributors will shortly be receiving an invitation to admire them.

An opaque roller blind has been installed to eliminate excessive light when the Museum is closed. In order to reduce the relative humidity when necessary, a de-humidifier has also been installed. This has cost just under £800 but grants of £470 have been awarded.

Indexing of newscuttings on cards has now been completed with the exception of the Scragg cuttings, on which work is still in progress. A card index to the Museum's photographs, unframed drawings and other artwork of local places and people is now well advanced. This will include cards for artists' names and also for Dorking picture postcard publishers, making it possible to locate all examples of their work held in the Museum collections. (A.A.J.)

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### **Spring and Summer Walks**

The Society's Spring Walk, led by Harry Gort, was held in brilliant weather on Sunday 23 May. A party of some 15 members assembled in the Old Cartlodge car park and after an enjoyable stroll through the woods we reached the southern escarpment of the North Downs, to be rewarded by a splendid vista towards the

greensand ridge above New Barn Farm. Returning through the woods by a different route, we enjoyed tea in the sunshine at the Old Cartlodge. The genial David Harding walked with your Chairman and Editor and was in splendid form on that day; so much so that his death a few weeks later came as a severe shock to us. It is good to have this last pleasant memory of him, smiling and chatting in his quiet self-effacing way as he strode through the sunny woods.

The Society's Summer Walk on Saturday 26 June was organised by Margaret Benselin, and led by John Sankey. A small but keen group of members gathered at the Headley Lane car park and walked up Juniper Bottom and into the yew wood, where they learnt among other things about plant succession, and how open grassland two hundred years ago gave way first to juniper and then to yew. A highly interesting afternoon was had by all. (A.A.J.)

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### **Affordable Housing in the Villages**

This Society, like so many others, deplors the loss of schools, shops and other basic amenities round which village life revolves. One of the missing items is so often houses which young people can afford. As Mr. Baker made clear when he talked to us at the AGM, it is Government policy to promote such housing if built by Housing Associations. Planning applications are being made round the county and three will be coming in shortly for developments in villages south of Dorking.

So far so good, but pause and think. If the houses are to be affordable, then that means using Green Belt or other land on which such building would not normally be allowed and which in the usual course this Society would oppose on principle. Is it acceptable under these circumstances? Can we be sure that these houses will be occupied by young people as the years go by? We are lucky in the Society in having an expert, Leslie Clark, to guide us in these matters. What do you think? (C.B.C.)

### Retail Depression in St. Martin's Walk

We are anxious to support the Council and the Chamber of Commerce in endeavouring to keep Marks & Spencer in Dorking and sustaining the viability of the new development at St. Martin's Walk. Would preferential parking rights help or would the spaces simply be filled up by people who already use them? What about a Tourist or Environment Centre in which the Museum and the Society as a whole might participate, set up in one or more of the empty shops? At least the recent introduction of displays by adjacent shops in these abandoned windows does something to relieve the depressing impression of inactivity around the High Street end, but what might be done? Your ideas will be welcomed.

(C.B.C. and A.A.J.)

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### Cultivating the Eastern Desert

The recent closure of the Jewellers A. B. Clear, established in Dorking since the 1930s, points up the steadily deteriorating retail attraction of the eastern section of the High Street beyond the 'Surrey Yeoman', now largely populated by estate agents, insurance brokers, garages and similar 'non-shops'. At one time this was a thriving area for the town's retail trade; visitors walking up London Road from the railway station eagerly patronised the several fancy goods emporia, confectioners, tea-rooms, book-shops, the Bon Marché and Edmonds Bros departmental store. There were no estate agents, in contrast to the seven or so there now.

The railway trade faded out in the 1950s and now the remaining shops suffer because many people on foot never explore beyond the easternmost pedestrian crossing, having parked their cars at St. Martin's or behind Sainsbury's. One remedy might be to apply a little thought to car parking charging policy. Instead of imposing a standard charge, free or reduced cost parking might be offered at the under-used Dorking Halls car park; more people would then be attracted to park at

this end of the town, walking past these shops on their way to and from their cars.

(A.A.J.)

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### The First Thousand Passed!

As a result of our Membership Drive this summer, our ranks now number almost 1,100. This is a real success and our thanks go to all who worked so hard. Next year we shall turn our attention to the 'Dorking villages', *but wherever you live, anything you can do meanwhile to persuade a local friend or non-member neighbour to join should not be postponed!* Those interested should get in touch with Linda Bailey (for her address and telephone number see below). A substantial membership gives the Society credibility in dealing with all who make decisions affecting Dorking and District.

(C.B.C.)

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### Society Officers

Earlier in this Newsletter we pay respect to the late David Harding, a true friend of this Society and a tireless worker for Dorking until his very sudden death. Those involved in the distribution of the Newsletter will already know that Michael Beggs has kindly taken on that aspect of David's work. We have completed our attendance at shows for 1993 and Barry Collins, our hard working publicity officer, has agreed to add this job to his other work for 1994. More good news is that we have a new Membership Secretary in Linda Bailey, who will be assisted by her husband Paul (their address is Danesmount, Tower Hill, Dorking, phone 884969). We are also grateful that Peter Hawkes, who would rather not be a candidate for Chairman, has said he will serve at least another year as Secretary, whilst Harry Gort, with no commitment for the future, has become Assistant Secretary to help spread the load. Hopefully you will learn at the Autumn Meeting who is to be proposed as our Chairman for next year.

(C.B.C.)

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**A Demi-Paradise** by Charles Kohler

Some sixty-five years ago I stood, for the first time, on the summit of Box Hill.

White clouds drifted across the sky. Beneath stretched a wide slice of south-east England. Meadows, ploughed fields, villages, scattered amongst the woods of the ancient Saxon Weald.

The slender spire of St. Martin's church topped the chimneys and slate roofs of Dorking. Beyond, the dark ridges of Leith and Holmbury hills: far away, the line of the Sussex Downs.

What a variety of scenery, caused by the emergence of many different geological strata. Smooth chalk hills: beech trees, dog rose, Old Man's Beard. Sand heights with fir trees, bracken, heather. The clay Weald with its oak trees and stubborn soil.

Blue butterflies fluttered among tiny flowers: blackbirds fluted. I stood enthralled within a demi-paradise. Words from George Meredith, the poet who trod these hills, came to mind:

*Yellow with birdfoot-trefoil are the grass-glades,  
Yellow with cinquefoil the dew-grey leaf;  
Every woodland tree is flushing like the dogwood,  
Flushing like the whitebeams, swaying like the reed.*

I said to myself: 'It is here, near Box Hill, I would like one day to live.' A few years later, that wish was fulfilled.

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Come with me on a summer's day to the bus stop by the Burford Bridge Hotel. Climb to the hilltop along the hedged pathway. At the Viewpoint, stop and rest. Gaze out on the Weald, Leith Hill, the South Downs, the spire of St. Martin's church.

Then leave the parked cars, shouting children, picnickers. Wander amongst the trees, discover some untrodden grass-glade. Be still, listen:

*Whispers in the grass,  
Bees humming their sonorous prayer.  
Breath of wild musk rose,  
A haunting air  
Of unseen presence,  
A feeling that there is someone there  
From long time past.*

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*THE HARE & HOUNDS - BURFORD BRIDGE - 1810*

*What low building is that, so invitingly neat,  
Where the way-faring man at the door finds a seat,  
With prospects so enchanting his mind to refill?—  
'Tis the cottage that stands at the foot of the hill.*

*From the smoke, and the din, and the hurry of town,  
Let the care-wearied cit to this spot hasten down;  
And, embosom'd in shades, hear the lark singing shrill  
In the cottage that stands at the foot of the hill.*

*Let the fierce party-zealot suspend his alarms,  
Nor here dream of invasion, or talk of arms;  
Here the sweet charms of Nature his passions shall still,  
As he treads the soft turf at the foot of the hill.*

*Here the belle, that is drooping from crowds and night air,  
May her freshness renew, and her roses repair;  
And the sick gather health without doctor or pill  
By a walk from the top to the foot of the hill.*

*Here's health to the cottage, and health to the plains.  
Ever blithe be your damsels and constant your swains;  
Here may Industry, Peace, and Contentment reign still,  
While the Mole softly creeps at the foot of the hill.*

MRS ANNA LETITIA BARBAULD

1743 - 1825