

DORKING & DISTRICT PRESERVATION SOCIETY



Established in 1929

NEWSLETTER

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DORKING & DISTRICT PRESERVATION SOCIETY

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EDITORIAL

Our editorial comment in the last issue comparing Dorking with Crawley prompted some thoughtful remarks from a Horsham resident with long experience as a West Country councillor much involved in town planning. He had visited Dorking several times recently and declared astonishment that 'the townspeople of a potentially very pretty town are not up in arms about planning blight which threatens the centre of their town.' He noted '.....a total disregard for the town environment demonstrated by the people of the Mole Valley District.....' What aroused his concern, he explained, was the way in which we allow the centre of Dorking to be so heavily used and ravaged by though traffic. West Street in his view was totally spoiled by it; pedestrianisation here would be a 'small achievement', attainable at modest cost, and its absence represented a lost opportunity. He also suggested that crossing the High Street was a hazard and the difficulty of doing so was damaging to the health of the town's retail trade.

Of course Dorking town centre would be a much more pleasant place if the main streets were without the continuous procession of cars and lorries passing though. The all day long nose-to-tail procession up West Street, filling this precious inheritance from our past with poisonous fumes and noise is indisputably an environmental disaster and motorists who use it unnecessarily should be more aware of the damage they do to the

town's attraction. There is a constant threat to life and limb for those brave pedestrians who venture onto West Street's perilously narrow shallow-kerbed footways. Exploration of the interesting antique and other shops (and indeed of our own Museum) is positively discouraged by the sheer weight of road traffic. Sooner or later, means must be found to pedestrianise the whole length, perhaps beginning with the upper section. When that is achieved Dorking will at once become much more inviting for tourists and casual visitors and its small retail traders will benefit greatly.

The High Street presents a more difficult problem for which there is no easy solution. In the 1920s, largely motivated by financial timidity, the authorities threw aside the opportunity of combining an east-west and north-south bypass and the way the town has been allowed to develop since makes an east-west ring-road a virtual impossibility without wounding our treasured rural setting; any route must impinge upon it. As for an inner relief road, the damage to the historic town centre this would cause is totally unacceptable. Many will recall that after a long battle with County Council planners this proposal was rightly consigned to the dustbin some years ago.

West Street is undoubtedly the more urgent problem; it is also more capable of remedy at reasonably low cost; indeed the solution

could be nearer than has seemed likely until recently. We learn from our splendid local newspaper that anonymous 'retail experts' consider Dorking 'deficient in not having a major supermarket'. It seems that Sainsbury's are anxious to help remedy this fault; their facility would be 50,000 square feet in size, serviced by a vast car park and placed at either the eastern or the western entrance to the town (a green field site would not be entertained by the planning authorities). It is claimed that such a store would act as a magnet to shoppers 'who may then go on to visit other shops', a comment we suggest should be taken with a generous pinch of salt. More tangible sweeteners are displayed before the Council: a new swimming centre if the Reigate Road site is allowed, or perhaps subsidies for road widening if land is found at Vincent Lane.

So, to accommodate the importunate retail planners, we appear to have a choice between converting the residential area on the western side of Deepdene Avenue and south of Reigate Road at this point into a sea of parked cars, or expanding the industrial site on the western side of Vincent Lane with related widening of that thoroughfare, allegedly an 'A' road, but at present no wider than a country lane and partly used as a car park. Some would certainly regard the Reigate Road option as spoiling what is at present an attractive eastern entrance to the town, thanks to the efforts of the old Urban District Council in the 1930s, and no promises of 'suitable landscaping' will assuage their fears, particularly as enlargement of the Deepdene roundabout seems a concomitant, given the additional traffic burden.

This Newsletter

Readers will have noticed the recent improvement in the presentation of this Newsletter. The front cover has been designed by Sue Tatham, and the text is now in Times Roman, thanks to Martin Wedgwood's computer. The attractive back cover items continue to be supplied by Eric Ferguson.

This eastern option will prove very tempting for the Council, since it offers a welcome subsidy for a new and much more splendid sports centre, of which councillors already dream, and for which they could claim credit.

A western site would of course be a very nasty pill for the residents in the affected area to swallow as they still lie licking their wounds after the Wickes defeat. Here too, houses may have to be demolished, although this may be avoidable. Possibly provision could be made in any new development for parking residents' cars which are at present kept in the roadway. If the consequential road widening and removal of parked cars allows two-way traffic in Vincent Lane, this offers the possibility of closing West Street to motor traffic, since a widened A25 here would remove virtually the only obstacle to restoring two-way traffic along it and along South Street.

A nice dilemma indeed. Foolishly we had sensed a prolonged lull, even a hope of deliverance from further major developments in the town, but it is not to be. Whilst Dorking may want to resist changes of this sort and it is virtually certain that a poll of its citizens would throw out both proposals, that may not be an option; pressures for this scheme will be very strong indeed and some hard thinking by citizens is indicated. It is fairly obvious what will happen if apathy is the order of the day. We should express our view *now* and not wait for planners and developers to drop into an entrenched position from which it will be virtually impossible to move them.

Alan A. Jackson

Michael Beggs has kindly assumed responsibility for distribution and the possibility of synchronising this with the distribution of *Dorking History* and Local History Group papers is being investigated, in the interests of lightening the task of the 'street-walkers'.

Chairman's Notes

As I am handing over as Chairman after five years I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have worked so hard for the Society and given me such excellent support. I have enjoyed my time as Chairman and I am very pleased that Barry Collins has agreed to take over. I know that he will give the Society the leadership it needs.

So many people contribute to our work and give their time and commitment and if I start naming names I shall fill this Newsletter. Of course the Chairman relies on the principal officers and I do not need to tell you who they are. As they are to retire with me, however, I must mention Owen Russ, Brian Hodges and David Loram. For 13 years, with Bill Merry, they have served as the Planning Team and we owe them a real debt. Bill is continuing and with Bill Lancaster, Beryl Higgins and myself, will form the new team.

We have had some sad losses in the past year. One was the death of one of our Vice-Presidents, George Green, on 30 October 1993. He was Treasurer, then Secretary and followed with ten years as Chairman. We remember him with gratitude, respect and affection. We propose to dedicate some part of our work at the Museum in his memory. What it is to be depends on the outcome of some current negotiations of which I may have some more definite news at the Annual Meeting.

We shall continue to work closely with the Mole Valley branch of the Surrey Society, particularly in the Planning Team. We need their support on the big issues and can offer in return our close knowledge and experience of what makes this area tick. The DDPS has much on its plate at present, quite apart from its normal ongoing work; the Gatwick threat will not go away without a

prolonged fight and in that and in the M25 extension battle we are grateful for the support of our MP, Kenneth Baker, and delighted he is also one of our members. There have been signs recently that the Government is really willing to consider setting out a Transport rather than a Roads policy, a principle that would have our full support.

Last year we carried out a membership drive in the Dorking town area and plan to continue this round the villages over the next few years. Lynda Bailey is filling the role of the late and much lamented David Harding not only with care and accuracy but with drive and enthusiasm too. While we had a lot of success in Dorking I must confess to a feeling that we should have done even better. *Please* all keep up the pressure to recruit new members. Having said that, I recognise that well over a thousand is no bad total for a local body such as ours. Much of our attraction springs from the fact that, unlike the division in so many other towns, in Dorking the Museum and Local History group are part of our Society. Long may that happy state of affairs continue!

Surrey is now in the throes of a local government review. We have made our views known, largely supporting the retention of the *status quo*. If truth be told, we have no great feeling of confidence as to the end result. Whatever the outcome, the role of our Society on behalf of all who live within our area will be of increasing importance. We look on 'preservation' as a positive duty and will be in the forefront of the battle to preserve the identity of this area and all that is best in it.

I wish the Society well in the future, and will continue to give it my support.

C. B. C.

Gatwick Airport expansion

The campaign to defeat the proposed second runway at Gatwick continues. The publicity of Newdigate Parish Council, led by their worthy Clerk, Bob Warner (0306-631284), is succinct and impressive. They held a public meeting on 13 September 1993, when the hall was filled to overflowing and many had to listen from outside. A second meeting followed at Beare Green on 2 November. Opposition is also being organised by the Gatwick Area Conservation Campaign (GACC) (Stanhill, Charlwood, RH6 0EP).

The proposed new runway is to the north of the existing one, and given the Government's seeming reluctance to impose financial penalties for poor path-keeping discipline, and its recent decision to increase night flights, the noise pollution at Capel, the Holmwoods, Dorking and the communities to the west of the town, nasty enough at present, will be doubled if this scheme goes ahead. Those resisting it actively therefore deserve the fullest support from *all* members of this Society. Do not sit back and imagine it is not your problem!

With the help of the District Council we are holding a public meeting in Dorking Halls at 20.00 on Thursday 10 March 1994 to bring the matter before the townspeople and encourage them to protest to Ministers through the Mole Valley MP. Could every member, PLEASE, write to him, before the end of May. His address is The Rt. Hon. Kenneth Baker, CH, MP, The House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. Use your own words, but DO write. The more letters he has, the better he will be able to present our case.

On Sunday 13 March we are asked to join all those surrounding Gatwick in creating a Ring of Fire. Anyone who has a garden and a bonfire to burn is asked to invite the neighbours in and to light up as the clock strikes six, when the church bells will ring out.

A. A. J. and C. B. C

Local Government Reorganisation

A review of local government has been initiated by the Government, the underlying intention being to abolish the existing county council tier and replace it with 'unitary authorities' (UA) assuming the county functions as well as those already the responsibility of the District Councils. Mole Valley District Council is too small to be transformed into a UA as it stands, and if the scheme goes through, must be amalgamated with parts of surrounding areas.

The Society, which has expressed its views to the Local Government Commission for England, is concerned about the effect of this proposed reform on strategic and local planning, especially the weakening of the former, and would prefer to continue with things as they are. We consider the present system works extremely well - so why change?

Should there be disagreement between the UAs it would open up the possibility of 'divide and rule' by central government (could this be the hidden agenda?). Also the Society feels that the larger UAs would be more remote from the people they are supposed to represent, and that decisions would be made without due consideration of local views, by councillors from other areas. We have told the Commission that if the County Council is retained, the District Council should be left as it is or, if UAs are to be formed and the SCC abolished, the MVDC should go into any larger unit as a whole and not be dismembered. A. A. J

Litter

A new cleaning contract, operative from last September, was expected to see the end of problems with rubbish in and around the Meadowbank pond. Clearance of litter from the grass verges and footways of the A24 and A25 continues to be less than satisfactory and it often remains untouched for weeks on end. The Society has offered to provide additional litter bins at sites chosen by the Council.

Sainsbury Proposals

You will have read what is said in the Editorial. The Society Council is unanimous in opposing the proposals in relation both to Vincent Lane and to the Reigate Road area. We all know the sort of 'goodies' which will be offered in exchange for a Planning Permission. These will be a temptation to Councillors at Mole Valley and to those local people who feel that they will not be directly affected. Be assured that we would all be affected to the detriment of Dorking and District, which this Society is pledged to preserve. We urge the MVDC not to lose its nerve and not to risk the long term damage to our town, which no short term gain would justify.

C. B. C.

Public Transport Topics

On 8 November 1993 in Pippbrook Council Chamber officials of the County Council, British Rail and local bus operators faced District councillors and representatives of residents' and rail and bus users' associations in a useful discussion of current public transport problems and developments. The SCC men revealed that it was SCC policy to encourage the use of school buses rather than ferrying in private cars. A bus services information point has been established at Dorking main railway station and it is hoped to install another in the town centre. Improvements in the Dorking-Boxhill-Headley-Leatherhead-Epsom bus service were also announced, including provision of a bus with disabled access and facilities. Discussions are also proceeding regarding the extension of the Post Bus to Wallis Green, Forest Green and Okewood Hill. It may be possible to offer vacant places to the public on school buses to and from these rather remote locations.

An interesting account was given as to the extent to which late night bus facilities from central Dorking to Beare Green and Capel on Friday and Saturday nights have suffered abuse and damage from inebriated passengers. As a consequence it has proved necessary to divert these workings away from the town centre.

Various complaints were voiced about bus and rail services, sometimes with little consideration of the financial and political realities underlying the provision of public transport in the 1990s.

It was announced that all services between Reading, Guildford, Dorking Deepdene and Gatwick would be operated by the latest type of turbo-diesel trains from 29 November 1993 and that there would be an improved timetable (restoring regular two-hourly calls at Gomshall, Dorking West and Betchworth) from May 1994.

This important meeting was entirely ignored by the *Dorking Advertiser*, who appear not to have sent a reporter

A. A. J.

Norbury Nonsense Killed

The Society was delighted to hear the news that the absurd and very costly proposal for further road building in the Mickleham Valley, involving desecration below Norbury Park and in the river meadows south of Leatherhead, has received its due quietus in favour of improvements within the existing curtilage of the A24. We suspect, however, that this is due more to lack of any prospect of funds than any belated conviction of its absurdity.

A. A. J.

Meadowbank

Water flows in to the pond from the sluice as it should and as it has not done for years. We will continue to monitor this. We are also taking up with the Council the problem of the silting up of the pond. To leave this for too long would prove, we suggest, a false economy. This whole area of grass and water needs constant and, we accept, expensive maintenance, but it is so important to the town.

C. B. C.

Spring Walk

Our Spring Walk this year will take place on Sunday 8 May. Come and join us at Bocketts Farm at 2pm. We will be walking in the wooded hills between there and Norbury Park and expect to be back at Bocketts Farm by about four o'clock.

When is a PFP a BOAT?

If a PFP (Public Footpath) is redesignated a BOAT (Byway Open to All Traffic) it can be used not only by horse riders, but by four-wheel drive vehicles, motor cycles and mountain bicycles amongst other late 20th century rural delights - so be warned! Concerned about such redesignations, your Society is liaising with the Leatherhead Countryside Protection Society on the problems raised.

Any broken or defaced footpath finger posts observed by members should be reported to the Secretary. **A. A. J.**

Planning Team Activities

The Planning Appraisal Sub-Committee during the last twelve months has vetted that half of the 1,300 Planning Applications submitted to the Mole Valley District Council which applies to the southern part of the District.

These were concerned with DIY Superstores; various changes of use of farm buildings; commercial, industrial and retail signs; creation and extension of fishing facilities and related car parking; aircraft museums; dry ski-slopes; mountain bicycle tracks; and communication aerial towers.

The Society commented on 33 of 650 Applications with, for us, satisfactory outcomes on some 24. **O.R.**

Dorking Local History Group

Membership continues to grow but the percentage of members actively undertaking research into local history remains very small. We have published *Chart Park Dorking: A Vanished Surrey Mansion*, a valuable piece of original research by Edith and Doris Mercer and Beryl Higgins and have as usual mounted a display for the annual Surrey Local History Symposium (this year's subject: '1,000 Years of Royalty in Surrey'). Another publication on Pixham should follow later this year.

Despite replacement of the water main above, the Dorking Caves in South Street, which date from at least the 1670s, continue to suffer from water leakage, calling a halt to our organised tours. Meanwhile we have a long list of people interested in a visit and desperately need a volunteer to take on the job of organising visits when these can be resumed, hopefully later this year. If you think you may be able to help in this way, please telephone Sue Tombs at Dorking 886101. **S. T. and A. A. J.**

PS to above

The water seepage appears to be getting less. Could all be well after all? If so, then Sue's call for a new Caves Officer is all the more urgent. Harry Tyler has done a sterling job for us over many years. Might you be his successor in this very satisfying job?

Dorking & District Museum Notes

The Chairman of the Museum, Lionel Green, writes:

Have you all seen the new hanging sign in West Street? This is the work of Mrs. Judith Minden and her skills are much appreciated. Did you also see the window display in St. Martin's Walk during the past two months? This showed something of the history of Deepdene and the Terrace. During 1993 the Museum was presented by the artist Mrs. Dorothy Parsons with seven original watercolours showing the demolition of the old mansion over several days in April 1969. We felt we had to show these to the people of Dorking, thus the display.

The Museum is a lively body and as loyal and efficient servants depart, others come forward to offer their services and talents. Although Miss Doris Mercer has resigned as Library Curator, she has been co-opted to the Committee and remains a valued steward. Mrs. Mary Turner has taken over in the Library and Miss Gladys Arlett is now Curator (Photographs). Mr. Ian Laurenson has become Museum Photographer.

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

Ornamental china tea tin, W. H. Cullen*;
 Seven watercolours of the destruction of
 Deepdene House, 1969 by Dorothy
 Parsons*;
 Emergency lamp for use in World War II
 blackout*;
 Brick dated 1843 from Tanner's bridge, Old
 School Lane, Brockham*;
 Late 18th century wooden tablet from Deep-
 dene House, in memory of Charles
 Howard, died 1714*;
 19th century chair rail, inscribed 'Kingston
 Union - Surrey and Middlesex' with coats
 of arms of these two counties*;
 A kitchen mincer c. 1900*;
 17th or 18th century key found in the garden
 of a house in Church Street;
 Two solid brass Gurkha-type knives made in
 Dorking Foundry, late 1920s*;
 Two late 19th century handmade rails from
 Okewood Church Sunday School*;
 Late 1940s 'Carefree' domestic clothes
 washing appliance*;
 Two lace caps;
 A nurse's mask;
 An Edwardian muff and stole;
 A Lady's swimsuit, c.1930;
 Four miniature goblets (three turned in
 wood), 1873/4*. **B. H.**

The card index of photographs, postcards
 and other illustrations in the Museum Lib-
 rary is now almost complete. The collection
 of framed pictures at present housed in the
 Library has *not* been indexed, pending
 decisions on which of these, if any, should be
 retained there as reference sources. We
 have approaching 100 unidentified photo-
 graphs of houses, persons and groups.
 Please ask to see these if you think you may
 be able to help.

Suggestions for further indexing projects
 (?Dorking tradesmen and shops) will be
 welcomed. **A. A. J.**

Mole Valley Festival of the Arts

Next autumn the Mole Valley District Coun-
 cil will be holding a Festival of Arts featur-
 ing exhibitions, displays and theatrical
 presentations drawn from all sections of the
 local community. In common with a number
 of other district organisations your Society

has been invited to participate. After some
 discussion your Council has decided that our
 contribution will be an audio-visual show
 presented by the well-known local person-
 ality Derek Forss. Derek has in the past
 presented similar shows at the Dorking Halls
 and those members who attended will no
 doubt remember the excellence of the
 presentation.

The programme will be a celebration in pic-
 tures and sound of Dorking and its country-
 side, augmented by a supporting pro-
 gramme featuring the Lake District and
 Dorset. Of particular interest will be a pre-
 sentation on Dorking's most famous resid-
 ent, Ralph Vaughan Williams, as well as a
 feature on Polesden Lacey.

The programme will take place on Friday 28
 October 1994 at the Dorking Halls and ad-
 mission will be by ticket - prices being £3-00
 for the stalls and £5-00 for the balcony seats.
 Refreshments will be available during the
 interval in the Martineau Hall. Details
 about the sale of tickets will be announced
 nearer the time.

This presentation is a must for all members
 interested in the pictorial beauty of both
 Dorking and more generally of Cumbria and
 Dorset, with the added attraction of fine
 music. Please make a note of this date in
 your diary. **B. C.**

Thoughts of an Hon. Treas.

It might be supposed that the Treasurer of a
 worthy and respectable charity would be a
 man thoroughly trained in the arcana of
 book-keeping, who knows his credits and his
 debits like the back of his hand and can
 apportion accruals and prepayments with no
 more conscious thought than used by the
 driver of a car when he turns his steering
 wheel on coming to a corner. I regret to
 have to report that in the case of the Dorking
 & District Preservation Society this is not so.
 Your Hon. Treasurer has had no formal
 training in book-keeping and finds it quite a
 problem to make the accounts balance.

What training I have had has led me to
 regard the Balance Sheet and the Profit-and-

Loss Account ('Summary of Receipts and Expenditure' for organisations like ours) not as the end product of my labours, as it is for an accountant, but as the starting point. It comes as quite a shock to a tyro hon. treasurer to realise that he may know all about the *theory* of book-keeping, but that he has actually no *practical* knowledge of how to do it at all. To this extent it is true to say that I have made up the accounts as I went along.

Fortunately, at about the same time as I took on this hon. treas. job I also acquired a computer, and the computer has a spreadsheet with which you can do all sorts of useful things. I set up a ledger with columns of analysis that run off into the blue distance to the right, well off the edge of my screen. (There is a theoretical maximum of 256 columns; could one ever use that many?) I get my come-uppance at audit time, because my printer can only handle A4 paper and I have to print out the whole of my spreadsheet on bits of A4, which I lay side by side and stick together with sticky tape at the back. Luckily our auditor is very understanding.

Out of all this come those documents about which I think, rightly or wrongly, that I actually do know something, namely the Balance Sheet and the P-&-L Account (Summary of R & E). I believe very strongly that you too should be able to read them and gather interesting information from them. Charities, unlike public companies, do not have to worry about giving information away to competitors. The great question nevertheless is: how much information should be provided for your instruction and entertainment in the Annual Report? If we give you the full accounts, there will be a host of insignificant and boring details; if too little, the accounts are uninformative and therefore also boring. In the last few years we have provided a consolidation of the accounts of the main Society, the Museum and the Local History Group, and may well do so again with the 1993 figures. I want, all the same, to try and give rather more information this time. If the results do not please you, please do not be backward in coming forward to complain.

H. M. W

SURREY HILLS

*Sweet Surrey hills that guard the fertile plains:
And distant downs, that fade into the blue,
White foamy fringe of orchards, blessed by rains,
And verdant valleys drenched by morning dew.*

*The greying tower, or tall ascending spire,
That peep above the leafy woodland screen,
The scattered homestead, and the straw thatched byre,
A blacksmith's forge, beside the village green.*

*Slow drift of fleecy cloud, and smiling sun
That, all responsive, earth, so quickly yields,
And transient touches, that we see begun
To grow to colours in the sober fields.*

*Who climbs Box Hill to scan the windy range,
Descants on distant landmarks by his skill
Is oft opposed by veiling, misty, change,
As nature paints her moving picture still.*

*A blurred impression of a clear wood-cut,
The silent shadow and sharp silhouette,
Dry sandy road or deep and miry rut
Shall still remain and be with us as yet.*

*The glint of sunlight on some terraced wall,
A cool, dark shade within a bluebell wood,
An oft repeated note, a cuckoo call;
The soul of England; so well understood.*

*And in the valleys, where the straying feet
Are wont to wander in the days of spring,
Through Abinger and Shere or Friday Street,
Midst scented blossom; there the linnets sing.*

*These are the things that linger on the mind,
In letters glit, upon each treasured page,
Our native jewels that we may ever find,
Are priceless splendours to our heritage.*