

Epsom Civic Society

shaping the future, safeguarding the past

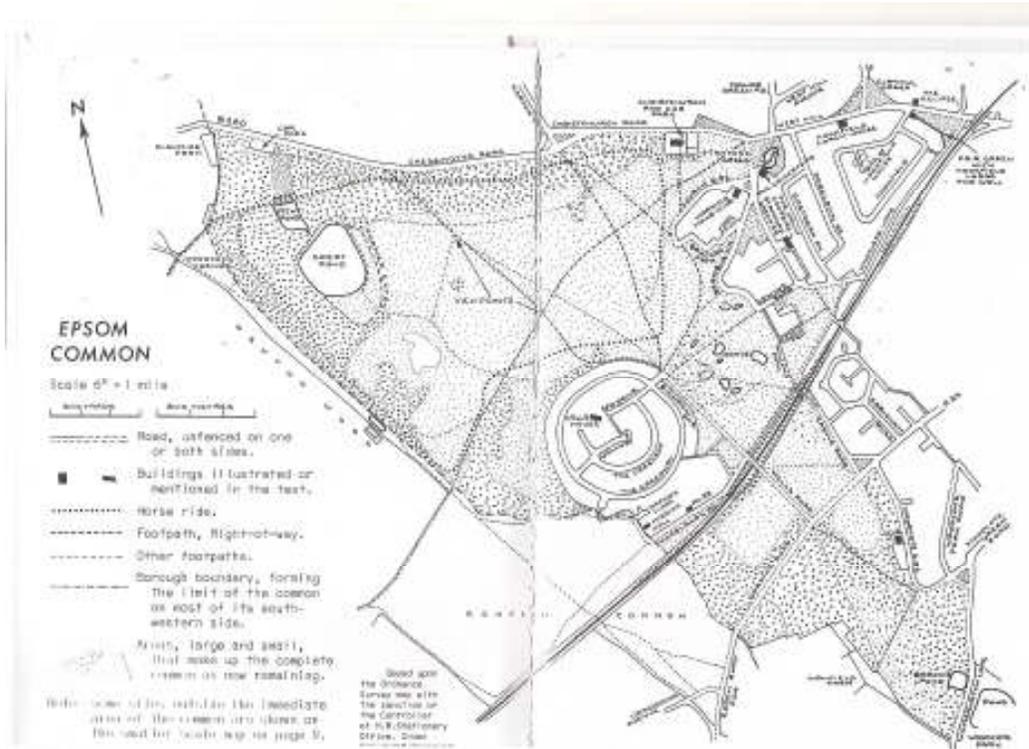
NEWSLETTER No- 132- SUMMER 2012

CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTARY

EPSOM COMMON

On Sunday 24th June Ian West is leading one of his interesting walks on to Epsom Common and I thought I would perhaps add to the information which he will impart. This will interest the many who are not able to join the walk and the map will add to the pleasure of those who are able to be there.

I am grateful to The Epsom Common Association for their slim, but full of information book which, with their permission, I have used. First of all it contradicts the widely held belief that a common was owned by all and sundry. Commons were in fact private property owned by the Lord of The Manor and must not be confused with common fields which were the residue of strip farming. The common itself, often known as the 'waste', covered all the land surface of the parish - some 435 acres - other than the common fields and various crofts and kitchen gardens etc. As late as the 15th Century the Abbott of Chertsey Abbey was the Lord of the Manor of Epsom. In the 14th century the Abbott was John de Rutherwyk who improved many parts including, in Epsom, a wood planted at Brounetts Grove, sometimes known as Butchers Grove, even more frequently as Brettgrave.



The 16th century saw many changes when, under Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries, Chertsey Abbey was closed and in 1537 its monks were dispersed. Henry took possession of its vast properties and Tudor merchants and noblemen were prepared to purchase them as lords of the Manor. Sir Nicholas Carew was the first secular Lord of the Manor of Epsom but he was executed in 1539 and the Manor of Epsom passed into the hands of a series of owners.

The 17th century saw the rise of The Wells as a tourist resort and this is a story which has been told elsewhere.

The Population Act of 1811 showed that 2515 people lived in Epsom in 197 houses but very few of these would have lived on the Common and any roads would have been very poor so that the area was isolated. Roads were gradually improved during the 19th C. but it took until the 20th C. for these improvements to reach the Common. In 1825 rival plans were drawn up for the construction of 'The Grand Imperial Ship Canal' which would link London and Portsmouth. It would cross Epsom Common and save 10-12 days on the sea journey. These plans would have cost some £7m and they came to nothing.

The originally independent Epsom and Leatherhead Railway was built in a cutting in the 1840's partly because the roads were so bad and the line became part of two larger companies. In 1867 Elizabeth Trotter of Horton House left £8000 to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners who built Christ Church which was consecrated in 1876. Lord Rosebery walked to the church from the Durdans for Evensong and occasionally with the Gladstones. In 1936 the Council bought the main Common from the Lady of the Manor, Henrietta Langley Strange, the last of a long series of personal manorial owners; she was paid £4,000 and the Council became freeholders of the Common. The Lordship of the Manor was purchased in 1955, when the local authority also acquired the market franchise and the Fair Green. The rights of the Common were thus vested in the Council as a corporate body. Who then is the Lord of the Manor? The Worshipful Mayor of the Borough of Epsom & Ewell during his or her year as Mayor.

Some fifty of us enjoyed our visit to The Bluebell Line which lived up to its name and we saw an abundance of primroses and cowslips as well. The grounds of Sheffield Park were rather damp but we all enjoyed a good day out. Thank you Sheila Wadsworth. **Harry Corben**

PLANNING APPLICATIONS

There has not been a lot of activity in the general application scene and the main item to report is the current stage in the saga of the Comrades Club.

The Comrades Club, The Parade: At the January Planning Committee, this application to build a four storey 77 bedroom Travelodge hotel and a replacement for the Comrades Club had been deferred yet again "for the Committee to take on board the issue of parking and side access" which had still been the subject of negotiations. In March the Committee resumed the debate. Officers had reported that an Access Agreement with the Council would allow patrons' cars direct access from The Parade to the Town Hall and Hope Lodge car parks, subject to final agreement of terms which would not be a planning matter. On this basis the application was recommended for approval. I could not be present to hear the arguments, but very interestingly the Committee decided to refuse the application for the reason that "the proposed development due to its bulk, height and mass would be out of keeping with the character and context of the surrounding area and would adversely affect the street scene", which is what we and the neighbours had been saying all along. No mention of car parking. It is unlikely that Travelodge will give up at this stage and it remains to be seen whether they make further amendments or appeal.

Ashley Road Bunkers: This is an amended version of the application withdrawn last Autumn to convert the bunkers adjoining Ashley Road for the storage of precious metals. It will be remembered that these extensive underground tunnels were built during the last war as air raid shelters, and have had no permanent use since then. The application includes revising the approach ramp to the tunnels and the construction of a new small building below ground level to serve as a reception area with offices and a limited car park. The land is in the Green Belt in which we usually oppose any building but in order to secure a use of the tunnels we said we would raise no objection on condition that the work is below ground level, that no part is visible from the road, that there should be no interference with the existing trees and woodland or with the general appearance or ecology of this environmentally valuable site. There should be safeguards against change of use and disturbance to local residents, and proper security provision must be made.

Sainsbury's, Kiln Lane: An exhibition was held last year of a scheme by Sainsbury's to build an upper deck to part of their customers' car park. Members of our Committee saw the proposals and thought they were reasonable. The detailed planning application has now been made, and we have raised no objection as it provides additional facilities for customers and objections by neighbours are said to have been dealt with.

Alan Baker.

CONSERVATION

The final tally for last year was 106 applications looked into and 27 letters written. A further 7 applications have been checked since the AGM but none of these have resulted in the need to make any representations. There have been several retrospective applications for advertisements on telephone kiosks. I have objected, on your behalf, to all of these. It seems completely illogical that such large advertisements should be acceptable on a telephone kiosk when they would never be countenanced in any other location in the town centre. It remains to be seen whether we were right or not.

I objected to one application on the basis of inadequate information (it was granted anyway). The matter was fairly modest, but there have been quite a lot of poor drawings over the year which fail to provide enough information to form a proper view about the proposals. I would imagine that the Council elicits further information direct from the applicant to assure itself that the proposal is acceptable.

It is with great pleasure that I can report that the proposed shop front on the corner of the High Street and Ashley Road (The Card Factory and Halifax) was withdrawn. I understand that the Council was equally unhappy, but had great trouble in talking to the architects. No wonder as they are based in America!

Leading on from this, we have responded to the Council's consultation on draft proposals for a design guide for shop fronts. This is very much a step in the right direction, although among our comments was the suggestion that the guidance should be much firmer and explicit in its advice. The attractiveness of Epsom to shoppers is becoming of increasing importance as high streets everywhere come under pressure from the internet and the impact of the recession.

Robert Austen



Queen Anne House

This photo shows the almost completed extension to the fine, Grade II listed Queen Anne House in Woodcote Road, together with the new, linking feature. We wrote expressing our concern about the design of the extension.

Malcolm Boyd

BLUE SKY DAY

The Blue Sky Day took place on the 8th of March and was, I believe, a success. I gave a report at the AGM, and in brief, each of six groups of members discussed two topics of interest to the Society, so that we covered twelve in all. Subsequently, I received short reports from each group which formed the basis for my report to the AGM. I am now putting together an action plan to take forward the various ideas. I am anticipating this being done through three sub-groups consisting of members of the committee plus other members of the Society. The plan will need the endorsement of the committee, but I anticipate the subjects addressed by the three sub-groups will be:

- The Future of the Society;
- Design and Civic Awareness; and
- Specific Issues

I have had several members kindly volunteer to join these sub-committees, but I would like a few more to ensure that they are not overwhelmed by committee members – as much as anything, we need an infusion of new ideas. No special expertise is necessary so please don't hesitate to get in touch.

Robert Austen

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The following were elected at the AGM on 19th April.

Harry Corben, Chairman; Alan Baker, Vice Chairman and Planning; Malcolm Boyd, Hon Secretary and Editor; Nick Lock, Hon Treasurer; Margaret Haslam, Minutes Secretary; Ishbel Kenward, Membership Secretary; Robert Austen, Conservation Planning; Piers Nicholson, Information Technology; Sheila Wadsworth, Events; Peter Follett, Communication, Angela Clifford, Downs; Harry Wilkinson, Hon Auditor, Philip Clifford, Archivist. At the committee meeting following the AGM, Peter Follett was co-opted to the committee. In an earlier life, Peter was a Chartered Surveyer. His name came forward too late for him to be elected at the AGM

Hon Sec.

MEMBERSHIP

Thank you to those members who have paid their Subs. and especially to those who have generously given donations. A reminder for those who have not yet paid - subscriptions are due by the end of June - £2 per individual, £3 per household. If you have not yet paid and you were out when he/she called, your Road Rep. should have put a note on this Newsletter giving a reminder of his/her address. Please save them an extra trip by taking your Subscription to them. If unsure whether you have paid or not please contact your Road Rep or me.

We now have an updated leaflet about the Society including the application form for membership. If you have neighbours, friends, family or colleagues whom you think may be interested please contact me for our new form. Please also destroy any old forms that you may have.

Ishbel Kenward (728570)

DOWNS

A special meeting of the Conservators discussed many matters pertaining to the proposed Diamond Jubilee Celebration Event on the Downs. As it will take place the day after the Derby, there are likely to be marquees etc. still standing. There will be no hog roast or alcohol tent, just refreshment vans and a small children's fairground ride. Portaloos may be necessary. The Racecourse insurers have raised concerns which must be addressed, especially wind direction and strength prior to lighting the beacon. At present there is a £3000 shortfall in funding but Rupert Trevelyan will work hard to raise this.

Dates of events were given plus an application to extend the period permitted for fencing for the Derby. This was agreed and a legal clarification was enclosed with the agenda. The Society had raised doubts in the past about the legality of the conservators giving such permission.

Angela Clifford

BLUEBELLS, STEAM ENGINES AND WET GARDENS

The fifty-two members who joined the May outing to the Bluebell Line and Sheffield Park had a treat, but a damp one. Luckily the cold snap had delayed the flowering of the bluebells so, from our special, observation coach, attached to the first "Bluebell" steam engine, No.323, we had a good view of them and the countryside as the foliage was not fully leafed. Also the volunteer staff made us very welcome, accompanying members across the tracks and giving us plenty of historical information. The refreshment on arrival was a bit slow in being served, but the wrapped biscuits were a meal in themselves. Established at the end of the museum a signal box from Withyham in Sussex had just been restored, so pulling the levers and hearing how they operated the points, plus passing the key, added an interesting and unexpected extra. Apparently the luxury observation coach was built in 1913 for the directors of the Blaenau Ffestiniog railway; they knew how to travel in those days!

We climbed back into the Hardings coach with Scott our driver and went the five minutes up the road to Sheffield Park Gardens. There most members enjoyed their lunch in the spacious restaurant in the Coach House tearoom, though unfortunately the promised World of Gilbert and Sullivan exhibition is now only open on Saturdays. The paths round the superb gardens were rather slippery but we could enjoy the five lakes and ponds, gigantic trees, waterfalls, cascades and bridges. Some of the azaleas and rhododendrons were out which added to the enjoyment. The house is not National Trust but provided a fine, crenellated, backdrop.

Do sign up for the outings even if they are oversubscribed. On this occasion we had ten on the waiting list, only one of whom did not get to join us. Work, family commitments or illness, all can change members' plans since bookings have to be made so far in advance. **Sheila Wadsworth**

POSTPONEMENT OF VISIT TO THE UNIVERSITY OF THE CREATIVE ARTS

Unfortunately the visit to the University of the Creative Arts on Tuesday, 12th June has been postponed. The current Pro Vice-Chancellor Professor Paul Coyle is moving to Newport and his successor is not yet appointed and there are also staff changes, so we hope to have a new date by October. Could the members who had signed up please ring Sheila Wadsworth (01372-273517) to confirm that this information has reached them. When the new date is arranged, the 71 people on the list will be contacted.

Listed Gates on Chalk Lane

The well-known Grade II listed but delapidated gates and railings to the former Durdans estate on Chalk Lane have at long last been removed for refurbishment.



DINNER THEATRE AT THE MILL AT SONNING

A pre-Christmas treat has been arranged for Saturday, 8th December at The Mill at Sonning.

The Mill has a system of a lunch prior to a theatre performance included in the ticket cost. This comedy finishing on the 8th is the Neil Simon play, 'California Suite', and is directed by Anthony Valentine who has previously combined with Simon to produce 'Plaza Suite', 'I Ought to be in Pictures' and 'The Odd Couple'. The theatre describes the play as "fun-drenched and sophisticated entertainment" - ideal preparation for the festive season. The cost will be £49 per person and the coach will collect members from the usual pick-up points. The bar opens at noon and the lunch is served at 12.30 - 2 p.m. The play begins at 2.15 p.m. Departure from the Mill will be by about 5 p.m.

The cost includes the meal, coffee, show and programme, the coach travel and driver's tip. If there are still tickets available in October, members will be welcome to invite their friends.

THE 2012 BUFFET SUPPER Friday 12th October

We enjoyed a fun get-together last year with the Downsmen Entertainers and this year we welcome member, Audrey Ardern-Jones, providing a Poetry and Music performance with some of her musical friends to our Buffet Supper. The occasion begins at 7.30 p.m. and finishes at 10.15 p.m. on Friday 12th October.

Tickets cost £18 each, as last year, and the Food Studio will provide the food from about 7.45 p.m.. Everyone has a welcome drink as they arrive.

Do come along and bring your friends to St. Joseph's Church Hall where there is plenty of parking.

IAN WEST WALK ABOUT on Sunday 24th June at 2pm.

This year the walk will be centered on the Wells Estate, an area which he has not yet covered. Meet Ian at 2pm at the junction of Wells Road with Woodlands Road by the railway bridge. There is plenty of parking space in Woodlands Road which runs along side the railway line. Most of the walk will be on the Wells Estate, then Ian will lead us across the common to Castle Road to see the 'Castle House'. The total walk is about one and a half miles but if it too far for anyone they can omit the visit to Castle Road.

SOME CHALLENGES FACING EPSOM (Talk given at the AGM)

A personal View by Mrs Frances Rutter, CEO of Epsom & Ewell Borough Council
Mrs Rutter qualified as a solicitor with a degree in Commercial Law. She has worked for both Richmond and Elmbridge Councils and has been employed at Epsom for three and a half years. Challenges in our Borough are similar to those faced by many others throughout the country. She prefers to address them in a more optimistic way - as opportunities.

The advent of the internet has affected the way in which people shop, but also local shoppers combine a 'coffee stop' with shopping - hence the proliferation of coffee shops in the town. The numerous empty shops gives the impression of lack of investment, but unemployment statistics extrapolated from Job Seekers Allowance applications show that overall in the South East the rate is 2. 8%, but in Epsom only 1.8%.

Pay freezes in the public sector affect spending ability - even of those who live in Epsom and work in London. Epsom is the most densely populated Borough in Surrey with high house prices making it hard for young people to buy. Even with the provision of affordable housing, homelessness is an issue and some people have to be in 'bed and breakfast' accommodation in areas as far away as Croydon and even Berkshire.

Change to the way benefit is paid may also have a deleterious effect, for example rent - formerly paid directly to a landlord - will now be included in the universal credit paid to an individual. Is it realistic to suppose that with pressure on feeding a family and heating a home, the rent will always be a priority? Health issues may arise with the changes proposed for Epsom Hospital and the introduction of GP commissioning - we shall have to wait and see. Frequency of rubbish collections can have health implications too.

Although Surrey is a safe County in which to live, Epsom and Ewell Council works closely with the police to address the alcohol related problems which continue to affect the Town Centre, especially at weekends. The electorate expects that any resulting mess from drinking is cleared up by the Council! Co-operation between the Borough and the police has also successfully closed some 'crack' houses locally.

As ever, traffic flow and parking are constant bugbears but the Borough is consulting with Surrey County Council (the Highway Authority) on these issues.

There has been a 27% reduction in Central Government Grant over the last two years,. In spite of efficiency savings more will have to be done with less - or more likely, less done with less!

There is a new 4 year corporate plan underway with 6 particular aims;

- 1 Promote economic viability
- 2 Promote sustainability and reduction of energy use via a parking and transport strategy and encouraging biodiversity.
- 3 Improve visual appearance of the town
- 4 Improve quality of life for both young and elderly vulnerable residents.
- 5 Promote strong, safe communities - use the Licensing Act as a means.
- 6 Manage resources efficiently and effectively.

Plan E is a very useful framework to enable these aims to be attained.

Following some searching questions, Mrs Rutter was thanked by Malcolm Boyd for a thoughtful and wide ranging talk.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Epsom Racecourse Trainers' Open Day Sunday 26th August

Family Fun Race Day Bank Holiday Monday 27th August.



The famous Bluebell Special train near Sheffield Park in West Sussex



A talk to members in the observation coach on the outing

Photos by Arthur Wadsworth



Construction sites on the old courts buildings on The Parade and Ashley Road, April 2012

APPLICATION FOR DINNER THEATRE - THE MILL AT SONNING Saturday, 8th December
Cost covers meal, coffee, show and programme, the coach travel and driver's tip.

Name/s

Address

Phone number

COST - £49 per person No. of tickets
Total cost £

- Departure (A) 10.15 a.m. Downs Car Park, near tea hut at Tattenham Corner
- (please underline) (B) 10.25 a.m. Methodist Church, Epsom
- (C) 10.35 a.m. The Street, Ashtead

Please return this application slip with your cheque made out to "Epsom Civic Society" and a stamped addressed envelope to Sheila Wadsworth, The Chestnuts, Farm Lane, Ashtead, KT21 1L1 (01372-273517).

APPLICATION FOR THE BUFFET SUPPER Friday 12th October

Name/s

Address

Tel. No.

No. of tickets @ £18 pp

Total £

Please return this application slip with your cheque made out to "Epsom Civic Society" and an s.a.e. to Sheila Wadsworth, The Chestnuts, Farm Lane, Ashtead, KT21 1L1. (01372- 273517).

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