

Let's go walkies - continued

the proximity of the world-famous Elstree Studios - a veritable Hollywood in Hertfordshire. Hats off, then, to Herts County Council, which has made a grant of £75,000 specifically to draw attention to this Elstree claim to fame – watch out for stars set into the station platforms.

Civic Societies are encouraged to produce trails and put on walks. We feel we are doing our bit. But more could be done to recognise these connections, so as to ensure they are conserved and interpreted more effectively, to the benefit of residents and tourists alike.

Fret not if you missed the June Walk. It will be repeated as part of Heritage Open Days on 12 September - see the Events entry below.

Also look out for the Heritage Open Days brochure giving full details – or visit the website. Chances are you will learn things new about St Albans – and get to visit some places you never knew existed.

So cue action – see you next time!



Current campaigns include:

Broadband Boxes - Civic Voice believes the nation needs broadband but it does not have to be at the expense of the street environment. (We couldn't agree more, and have objected to several in the city - Editors!)

Street Pride is Civic Voice's national campaign supporting local action to help rid our streets of unnecessary clutter. The organisation is gathering evidence to support a national call for action to create more streets to be proud of. (We will forward this Newsletter plus other photographic examples to Civic Voice - Editors)

Civic Day is a new initiative when civic societies across England will invite people to celebrate their area and discover more about where they live. A diverse program of events and activities showcasing civic society activity is being planned, focused on Saturday June 25th 2011 as the first Civic Day. (What will we do in this, our 50th Anniversary year? Ideas wanted, please.)

Membership Matters

For up to date information on events and other Society matters go to the Society's website www.stalbanscivicsociety.net.

Forthcoming Society Events

(free to members)

Sunday 12 September 2010

Heritage Open Days

Desperately seeking

Arthur Melbourne-Cooper

Join the search for the St Albans-based UK film pioneer. Marion Hammant leads a 90 minute walk. Start 2.30pm City Station (Ridgmont Rd exit), ending at the Odeon, London Road.

Saturday 25 September 2010

Visit to Dover via Canterbury

Tel: Bryan Hanlon 01727 851734 for details

Wednesday 29 September 2010

The Abbey Theatre: past, present and future

Speaker TBC The Cross Street Centre, Dagnall Street at 8.00pm

Wednesday 20 October 2010

Awards and members evening

Maltings Arts Theatre 7.30pm for 8.00pm Wine and canapés

Wednesday 17 November 2010

BRE: Building a better world

Helen Ball & Chloe Murphy (of the Building Research Establishment, Garston) The Cross Street Centre, Dagnall Street at 8.00pm

Wednesday 15 December 2010

Historic street furniture and features in St Albans & District

Brian Adams (local historian) The Cross Street Centre, Dagnall Street at 8.00pm Refreshments & hot mince pies afterwards

Wednesday 19 January 2011

Magic lantern to multiplex

Richard Gray (Cinema Theatre Association) The Cross Street Centre, Dagnall Street at 8.00pm

Saturday 29 January 2011

Residents First Weekend - Clock Tower Opening

Hot punch, shortcake & views. Free - 2.00pm to 4.00pm. A chance to promote the Society.

Friends of Verulamium Park talks of Civic Society interest

Madeleine Sansom, Chair of the Friends of Verulamium Park, draws our attention to the following meetings at St Michael's centre at 8.00pm:

Thursday 30 September

English Heritage and Verulamium Park

Deborah Priddy (English Heritage).

Thursday 2nd December

Tree planting plans, the proposed woodland walk and improved signage

Chris Green (Museums Director).

To join or renew membership

Subscriptions are renewable on 1 April each year

Individual Members	£10
Family Membership	£15
Pensioners/Students	£7
Residents' Associations	No charge
Corporate Membership	£50

To join or check payment details please contact the Membership Secretary, Bryan Hanlon, tel: 01727 851734.

The Society acknowledges with gratitude the support from the following Corporate Members:

- T&B (St Albans) Ltd
- Debenhams Ottaway
- Rumball Sedgwick
- DLA Town Planning Ltd
- National Pharmaceutical Association

St Albans CIVIC SOCIETY

Newsletter | Autumn 2010

President: Geraint John

Chairman: John Thomson 07711 696 417

This edition has been prepared by Peter Trevelyan (Vice-Chair) and Eric Roberts (Committee member). If you have any comments, do write to the Editors at 3 Abbey Mill End, St Albans AL3 4HN or email ptrevelyan@aol.com.

Chairman's introduction

At a well attended AGM on 24 June, I was elected Chairman of the Society. I acknowledge this is a great honour and I will act as Chairman for one year whilst at the same time maintaining my role as Treasurer.

I have the support of a splendid committee strengthened by the addition of four new members; Alison Chant, Janet Ouston, Robin Booth and Malcolm Holliday. A warm welcome to all of them.

I have four priorities for this year:

CONSTITUTION: Our constitution was last amended in 1994 and is out of date. For example, the current constitution contains no mention of the word "Trustee". I will conduct a review and present a revised version firstly to the committee and, following their agreement, present the revised version to the members for approval at the next AGM.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: The level and construction of the Society's subscriptions needs to be reviewed (an annual subscription of £7 equates to just 13 pence per week). This is a task which I will undertake. Again I will report back to the committee and then to the members for approval at the next AGM.

50th ANNIVERSARY: Next year the Society celebrates its 50th Anniversary of its formation. The committee is determined to celebrate this event in style and has formed a subcommittee of myself, together with Eric Roberts, Jill Singer, Alison Chant, and I hope others, to produce ideas as to what form the



Trees in St Peter's Street - a positive result from the Society's partnership with the Council.



Blooming St Albans!

celebrations should take. We should like ideas from the general membership, also a few volunteers (i.e. YOU) to join this special subcommittee (see below how to register your interest).

NEXT CHAIRMAN: During the year, I and the Committee need to find a successor to serve the full three years.

I must thank Peter Trevelyan for his excellent stewardship of the Society over the past three years as Chairman. A hard act to follow. I am delighted that he is remaining on the Committee as Vice-Chairman.

Finally, I hope this will be an enjoyable year. If you wish to contact me with any views my e-mail address is john@jthomson.dsl.interdart.net and my telephone number is as above.

John Thomson

Editors' Notes

The saga of Westminster Lodge rumbles on. Readers of the last newsletter will recall mention of the Plans Referrals meeting held on 28 April, which has left a lingering and unpleasant odour. So much so that the Society has made a formal complaint to the Standards Committee. Further piquancy was added by the Overview & Scrutiny committee held on the 19 July which recommended a review of the size of the pool.

In seeking to reject the O&S recommendation, an emergency Cabinet meeting was held on 10 August. The Society spoke. Our issues were, and remain, that –

1. there is an acknowledged deficiency in water space in the District, which needs to be addressed.
2. the interests of the Abbey Theatre must be protected.
3. the way the application was processed.
4. the viability of the spa and gym needs more careful evaluation.

The decisions at these various meetings all had the appearance of being made in advance; the hours spent on discussion and debate were simply a show. The way permission was pushed through at the

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Editor's Notes - continued

planning stage raises the rhetorical question, in the absence of opposition from the Society, might that twin-tower cinema plan have been similarly approved in Bricket Road? Just as worrying, could it happen again with other Council-backed schemes in the city centre? We sincerely hope not, and that the Council will follow its Code of Conduct both in letter and in spirit.

In this Newsletter, we highlight what continues to happen, both good and bad, to trees and even hedges in the City. Unfortunately, there is too much bad. The Herts Advertiser editorial on 22 July summed it up nicely:

“The London Plane tree at the junction of London Road and Marlborough Road, will be sorely missed - it was a real beauty.

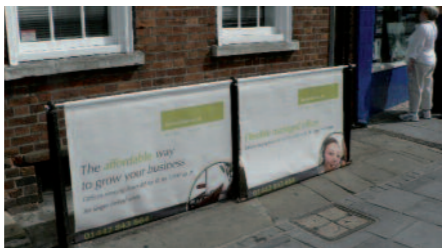
The sad state it has been left in since contractors were stopped from felling it any further only serves to show how vital conservation area rules are in protecting the lovelier features of cities such as St Albans.

And it is now up to the council to ensure that those who profess not to understand conservation area rules are brought firmly into line to ensure that such a thing does not happen again”

The former (Odeon/Alpha) cinema project continues to capture the imagination of the public. We feature more comments from 'Odeon' and note that the new owners are seeking a possible new name too!

Whilst still talking of cinema, it appears that Cabinet are set on pressing ahead with the conversion of the Maltings Arts Theatre into a limited seats venue. This is despite questions raised by us and the O&S committee. Things may become clearer by October. The Society opposes the reduction in seating space and the possible diminution of this valuable community arts and live-performance amenity. It certainly is not because of possible competition with the Odeon/Alpha.

Breaking news on the Rail Freight front. Although the Inspector recommended approval, the new Secretary of State (Eric Pickles) decided otherwise. We breathed a sigh of relief, but Helioslough have commenced a judicial review. This could run and run! It's not good.



An advertising banner cluttering up both the pavement and a listed building.



The destroyed hedge exposes the car park.

The Society has recently written to the new Head of Planning, Heather Cheesbrough, raising concerns over a growing number of eyesores in the public realm. Our photographs show some examples. On the same subject, we are meeting with Councillor Beric Read for a prototype mini-audit of the important area around the Clock Tower and Market Place. We have been asking to do this since February. Patience rewarded? We shall see.

In late July, Society representatives have attended separate workshops on the LDF and City Vision. At present, these are going nowhere, as the LDF housing targets are up in the air, and the City Vision feels as if it is sitting on shifting sands. The Planning Policy Advisory Panel, which met on 27 July, could only suggest testing the 'sustainability' of three different housing options. One definite outcome is that the LDF Core Strategy will be further delayed! The latest Hertfordshire House planning application, the proposed housing site on Harpenden Road and the Hotel proposal near the M25 raise the spectre of planning by Inquiry.



One small addition to the Clock Tower ephemera is the new badge available for just 50p. Get yours!

The Society's 50th Anniversary approaches. As our Chairman says above, your input and ideas would be welcome. Also needed, as highlighted at the 21 April meeting, and AGM, are volunteers for the following:

1. designing and/or staffing an occasional market stall to promote the Society;
2. handing out leaflets as and when a campaign arises (so we are ready for the next one, whenever that may be!); and
3. delivering any campaign leaflets in your street / local area.

Please email Jill Singer on oxhey@oxhey.demon.co.uk or write to her at Kingsbury Manor, 200 St Michael's Street, St Albans AL3 4SE.

Congratulations to Sycamore Wholefoods, the overall winner of the Retailer of the Year 2010. We are already planning for 2011. Meanwhile, watch out for the Festive Pub of The Year competition in the St Albans Review in November / December. We will be one of the judges.



Nick and Pam of Sycamore Wholefoods.

Below: Civic Society v. Councillors cricket match in Victoria Playing Field. No one is really sure who won!



Plane awful.

Standing up for our trees

Once again our local press reports the destruction of one of our city's mature trees – a beautiful London Plane in full leaf on the corner where Marlborough Road meets London Road.

This Conservation Area tree, some seventy feet high, made a significant contribution to the otherwise somewhat barren street scene. It was probably also doing its level best to help relieve the pollution in the traffic-fumed air. Al fresco diners at the restaurant where it stands please note!

Ignorance or disregard of rules for tree works in Conservation Areas may be to blame here, or failure by contractors to check that permission to fell had been granted. Either way, it's St Albans' loss.

There have been still more Conservation Area losses recently. Gone are the five mature trees – sycamore and ash – in the beer garden of the Fighting Cocks, and a magnificent holly tree in College Street. In both cases, permission was sought, but should it have been granted so readily?

If permission to fell a tree in a Conservation Area is refused by the Council, it then has to seek a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) to protect it. This, sadly, the Council is often reluctant to do, so the felling gets approved.

To its credit, it was the Council that stopped the cutting down of the London Road London Plane – but only after many branches had been severed, leaving it

mutilated, probably irretrievably so.

Rules have been broken. Fines for the owner and contractor, together with a replanting order should be imposed. This, plus a sterner approach to felling applications, would send out the message that St Albans values its trees - and you mess with them at your peril.

The Civic Society was instrumental in the replanting of St Peter's Street, also with London Planes. Imagine that thoroughfare without them now! London Road and Victoria Street could be transformed with similar tree-planting schemes – which only adds poignancy to the current saga.

We are said to be happier and healthier when trees are part of our environment. Let's treat them with the respect they deserve.

Eric Roberts

Let's go walkies

June saw what is now one of our annual guided walks around a part of the city as the Civic Society's contribution to The St Albans Festival.

This year's was entitled 'Desperately Seeking Arthur Melbourne-Cooper'. Here was a St Albans citizen who had a pioneering role in the development of the UK film industry at the turn of the last century, with studios in Alma Road where Telford Court stands today. His cinema, the Alpha Picture Palace, stood on the site of the London Road Odeon, a building which hopefully one day will re-open under the guiding hand of Berkhamsted's James Hannaway.

In the last Newsletter, we announced the launch of the Samuel Ryder trail, jointly written and funded by the Society (editors' note: copies available at the Tourist and Information Centre - free).

Arthur Melbourne-Cooper and Samuel Ryder would have been contemporaries, establishing in the city the respective businesses that would leave their mark on history.

St Albans has a rich legacy of people who made a real contribution to the country's and indeed the world's industrial evolution in the 1900s. Our film heritage is impressive (certain councillors please note!) including the Kubrick connection being celebrated at the City Museum, and

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ODEON calling - again!

Hello! I am still with you having been bought by that nice man James Hannaway who looks after cousin Rex over in Berkhamsted. Thank you to all, those who helped me with cash to escape from the hands of the flat development owners.

On Saturday 3 July I opened my doors to the public for the first time since 1995. And, you lovely people, young and old, came in your hundreds - even a thousand.

Sorry I was a bit untidy inside. The builders were in clearing things out ready for my restoration. But you did have a good look around.

James gave a special talk at 1pm, repeated later in the afternoon as people were still flooding in. He explained what was going on; how funds still had to be raised and, a nice touch, thanked my friends the Civic Society, especially Marion Hammant, for

helping galvanising support and getting a bead of steam up in the New Year.

James also explained how I may be given a new name. I'll open my doors again during the Heritage Open Days week-end (Sunday 12 September) when the winning name will be announced.

But thanks a million (literally!) for all your support. Whilst there is many a slip between cup and lip, I hope to welcome you all in 2012 to my official opening.

With such support it makes that councillor who said "no-one wanted me back again as a cinema" (Plans Central committee 9 June 2008) even more off the mark. I do hope he has changed his mind by now.

See you soon!

Signed: ODEON

(with help again from Eric Roberts)