

Email from Andrew Leonard Smith

Historic sewer vent pipes



Is anyone aware that St Albans has a number of Historic Sewer vent pipes within its boundaries? These strange poles which are sometimes referred to as 'Totem Poles' or 'Fumaroles' are a source of mystery and intrigue to many people, as many are unsure as to what is the true purpose of these strange edifices!

There are at least two good examples in St Albans (One is in Belmont Hill, and the other is on the junction of Hatfield Road/ Lemsford Road*). There were two further poles in York Road and Marshalls Drive, but I believe these have long since gone.

Originally the two surviving examples were higher than they are now and had a sort of 'Crown' at the top (Editor [PT] - I remember these vividly) but have long since lost the top section.

Nationally these strange poles have in some quarters attracted a lot of attention, as there is a lot of information on line about these strange edifices, including photos of surviving examples, and some have even been listed by English Heritage. (There is one listed Grade 2 in Tunbridge Wells) and maybe the two surviving poles could be refurbished and restored to their



former glory and splendour.

I don't know who is responsible for these poles, is it the council or the water company? Also, apart from the two surviving examples in Belmont Hill and Lemsford Road, does anyone know of more of these strange poles in St Albans? These unique edifices should be recognised as part of our heritage.

*Pictures of both pipes are now on Facebook in the National Stench Pipe Appreciation Society.

Membership Matters

We regret to advise the sudden death of Chris Atkins, who helped with the 'Stop Tesco' and Railfreight issues. Our condolences to his family and friends.

Society Events - Spring 2010

Wednesday 17 March
Good quality, small scale, domestic homes in urban settings

Simon Conder, architect
(winner of our 2007 award).
The Cross Street Centre, Dagnall Street
at 8:00pm

Wednesday 21 April
Open evening - Your Civic Society - does it have a future?

A discussion session for Members only to offer ways of ensuring a future for the St Albans Civic Society.
The Cross Street Centre, Dagnall Street
at 8:00pm

Saturday 8 May

Birmingham visit.

Coach leaves St Peter's Street at 08.45.
Tickets from Bryan Hanlon 851734

Thursday 24 June

Annual General Meeting

The Octagon Centre, St Peter's Church,
St Peter's Street 8pm.
Light refreshments

Advance Notice

Saturday 25 September 2010

Visit to Dover and Canterbury.

Tickets from Bryan Hanlon 851734

To join or renew membership

Subscriptions are renewable on 1 April each year

Individual Members	£10
Family Membership	£15
Unwaged Members	£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 | Spring 2010

President: Geraint John

Chairman: Peter Trevelyan 01727 843656

Chairman's and Editors' Notes

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

This is the three C's Newsletter - Commuters, Cinema and Conservation!

Commuters. First there is Eric's article on their current misery line. The Society is very keen to engage with more of the thousands of these people. It would be wonderful if they became members, but it seems they are almost to a man and woman too exhausted after the daily grind dealing with FCC getting to and from the City. We can understand that few have the energy left to address civic matters - but we are still looking out for them.

Cinema. The Odeon, or hopefully the Alpha Cinema, is highly topical. The piece by Eric speaks for the building, as it were, and Marion's article gives the latest news. We have come so far. The campaign has certainly caught the imagination of the public and apparently stirred dormant cinema supporters into life, albeit perhaps with a political motive.

Conservation cuts. The cuts to the Council's Conservation team still give cause for concern. We are pleased to record that, following the letter reproduced here, a meeting with the new Head of Planning, Heather Cheesborough, has been agreed and arranged. The item from Andrew Leonard Smith is a timely reminder of how little bits of our heritage can get overlooked.

Two other matters are worthy of note. First, Tesco is taking a lease on the old Woolworths store in the city centre (the two sign boards - see photos - say it all!). The company is also abandoning plans for a supermarket on London/Alma Road.



Tower with a view - help needed



From here...



...to here

So our previous campaigning as part of STOP TESCO has paid off. Well done everyone - quite an achievement against such a heavy-weight company. Did you notice that Tesco referred to the emerging LDF (Local Development Framework) in arriving at their decision? The LDF clearly ruled out a big supermarket in London

Road. Tesco's decision demonstrates the value of an up to date local plan.

Let us hope that the planning of the Alma Road area proceeds in a joined-up manner; the adjoining vacant school site and the cinema should be considered as well in a comprehensive plan for the area.

The second matter is the LDF Core Strategy. The Cabinet resolved in January to remove all eight major Green Belt housing sites - welcome news. However, that is far from the end of the story. There is a national election in the offing, and this could well alter the regional context. This means that, once again, the LDF is in limbo and may be delayed yet again! Oh dear!

Your attention is drawn to the insert (for members only) concerning the important meeting regarding the future of the Society on Wednesday 21 April. We would also remind you that subscriptions become due on 1 April and it would help our Membership Secretary if they could be paid promptly to avoid unnecessary correspondence. Thank you.

The Society opened the Clock Tower for the Residents' First weekend with Jane Journet managing the arrangements. Some 250 people visited - no mean feat to get that number up and down in 2 hours! Which reminds us to say that Clockateers (volunteers to man the Clock Tower) are wanted for the new season starting at Easter. Contact Alan McCartney on 866380.

First Capital Connect woes



The calls for First Capital Connect to be stripped of its Thameslink route franchise are understandable. The poor service is affecting people's lives, their work, health, family and social activities, and even the St Albans' economy because, exhausted and frustrated by delays, once home, people just don't want to go out and do things.

An urgent inquiry is needed to identify why things have become so bad – with remedial action taken.

If we do get a new franchise operator, it must be something more than yet another repainting of the same trains, signs, seats and lampposts - as if that suddenly made everything better again, while, apart from a new face at the top, nearly everyone else stays the same as before.

The latest move by FCC in appointing a new Route Managing Director, the third in a year, doesn't exactly inspire confidence that they've got the message. He is reported as coming from "an engineering and new trains" background within the company.

This smacks of an appointment with more of an eye on the future Thameslink Programme rather than someone with the experience and skills to start knocking some heads together so as to actually deliver on train operations and passenger (customer) service issues. After all, the present incumbents don't seem to be doing these very well.

The Industrial and Human Relations management, especially in respect of Train Crew (Drivers), could do with a review too.

BR had its faults, but is now long gone. Other privatised routes have achieved some success – look at nearby Chiltern Railways.

So the jury's now out on this latest Managing Director. Urgent action is needed. People are tired of the rueful rhetoric presently coming from FCC.

This isn't the way to run a railway. Just how many more chances do they expect to get? It's time to blow the whistle – and how! St Albans and its residents deserve better.

Eric Roberts

The following is an extract from the text of a letter sent to the Chief Executive of the Council regarding the cuts to the Conservation Team

Dear Daniel

... At a committee meeting of the Society on 7.12.09 it was agreed we should write outlining our concerns in more detail. This would be in preparation for the joint meeting that you mention, which we hope will take place soon.

1. In our open letter to all Councillors dated 9.11.08, when redundancies in the Conservation and Design Team were being discussed, after originally having been denied, we questioned the Council's commitment to Heritage. The subsequent cuts now send out the wrong message, not only to those anxious to do the right thing and abide by the rules and guidelines, but also to developers. It also, in our opinion, makes a mockery of some of the Council's Vision Statements.

2. It is understood, that following the cuts, the planning applications for individual buildings would not have specific input from the Conservation and Design Team. Their involvement would be limited to major developments. Indeed it is understood that if a request by a member of the public is made concerning possible conservation advice on a proposed development, it is probable they will be told no one is necessarily available to assist.

3. The current unsatisfactory situation has, apparently, evolved with no input, comment or representation from the Council's own Heritage Champions. What is the point of having such Champions* and The Historic Forum if they are not involved when such fundamental and far-reaching changes are made? Moreover, these Champions have made no comment that we are aware of.

4. We are told such cuts took place in order to effect savings. It is unacceptable that cuts in front line services, which will have a detrimental impact on the historic fabric and look of the City, are being made at a time when the Council is paying substantial sums for interim personnel and consultants. Evidently cuts are being made in areas which are discretionary and not subject to targets. The implicit assumption is that the only planning services that are likely to be retained are those which are required by Government regulations.

As you can see, we are extremely concerned at what is going on, or not, now. We really do want to discuss this as soon as possible.

Peter Trevelyan

* Editors' note: The Council's Historic Champions are Cllr K Morris (Lib Dem) and Cllr Chamberlain (Con).

Hello again

Remember me from back in the Autumn of 2008 when I wrote and told you about my trial at a council planning meeting on 9th June?

On that evening I was condemned to death by demolition so as to build 14 flats, with councillors voting seven to three against me. Some pretty nasty things were said as I told you, with no one really standing up for me despite the pleas made by my chum from the Civic Society.

Well, I'm still hanging on in there – thanks to that nice man James over in Berkhamsted who looks after my cousin Rex there.

It seems that something called the Credit

Crunch and a lull in the property market may have come to my rescue. My owner hasn't gone and flattened me (excuse the pun) but put me up for sale instead.

Enter the man from the Rex. He has made a bid to own me and bring me back to life again so I can start showing you lots of films once more.

I'm very grateful to the Civic Society for continuing to stand by me and to a young lady called Alexandra and her friends who came forward to offer support and encourage others to do so too.

A Public Meeting was held at cousin Rex's on Sunday 29th November 2009 to discuss my rehabilitation. The place was packed out with standing room only. 'House Full' as they used to say. I'm

overwhelmed. Thank you so much. It certainly goes to show that the Councillor who said at my trial that no one wanted me back as a cinema is still as wrong now as he was then.

I know I'm not off the danger list yet. But I've been given a chance that I hope everyone can agree with. There really is film heritage here in St Albans worth conserving.

Please do all you can to support me. I'd love to welcome people to my Opening Night and to many, many more movie performances.

Signed: ODEON

(with help from Eric Roberts again)

Odeon to Alpha – and Alpha for all!

It's been all systems go again for the campaigning arm of the Civic Society ever since the shock announcement by James Hannaway, would-be purchaser and restorer of the old Odeon, that contrary to the assumptions of many in that packed audience at The Rex on 29 November, there were no backers waiting in the wings, and the residents of St Albans had just a few weeks to find nearly £1 million.

It felt more worthwhile to go for it than just to shrug our shoulders and quietly give up. So it was once more out with the leaflets to the streets and letterboxes, and – a new venture for us – the setting up of an online campaign – a kind of chain letter with a purpose. At the time of writing (end of February) more than £800,000 has been raised. Not all our doing, we hasten to add. There were some big beasts out there who were ready to be cooperative.

When you come to read this, we should know if James Hannaway has been successful. And then we'll be into the long haul of finding the £2 million plus needed for refurbishment. Your ideas will be most welcome.

And in case you're wondering what all the fuss is about, here, in no particular order, are the reasons why The Odeon matters.

1 It's a landmark building on a gateway route. Restoration here would mean regeneration for the whole area – which sorely needs it. (Editors' note to Tesco - please pay attention!)

2 St Albans has few examples of Art Deco architecture: this is one of them.

3 It's built on the site of The Alpha Picture Palace, the county's first purpose-built cinema opened in 1908 by Arthur Melbourne-Cooper, the UK film pioneer. His importance to St Albans' heritage is recognised on the continent – if not by our own District Council. And in an elegant compliment to this local celebrity, The Alpha it may very well become. (Editors' note to some Councillors - please pay attention!)

4 We need a cinema – and a cinema for everyone with a wide-ranging programme, like The Rex. And why not a beautiful one too?

Please note re Comment 4: the Civic Society is not being elitist: it has always campaigned passionately for a cinema for every age and every taste – just what the community needs. (Editors' note to certain local political parties - please pay attention!!!)

So let the cry be Alpha for all!

Marion Hamant

Eversbed's building (now owned by Tesco) and the Odeon cinema

