



KEEP IN TOUCH



'Keep in Touch' was the message emblazoned on the posters describing The Society's achievements during the preceding year. And 'Keep in Touch' was the final injunction of the spirited overview presented to the audience at 'Celebration 2014' by chairman Chris Marsden. He alluded to the progress made by the The Society in respect of the Library volunteer programme; the Red House; the secondary schools issue; the retailers on the high street; the moves to formulate a forward transport plan (more of that on page two) and the schools competition (see page three) and promised further development in these and other areas as the coming year unfolded.

He asked for help from members – 'Keep In Touch' – on the various working parties and for their backing, as and when required, on issues like the Red House revitalisation plan, coupled with a particular appeal for a fund raising officer. This is especially needed to sustain the momentum of the last couple of years; it is not huge sums of money that are needed. The Society receives some £5000 in donations from its membership but could, ideally, do with another £5000 a year to ensure it is able to fulfil its commitments. Meetings, literature, publicity and other campaigning and allied necessities all cost money.

Are you or do you know of someone who could take on this vital role?

Opening the meeting Alison Steer, The Society's President, thanked the officers and committee for their sterling efforts throughout the year. The Society has lost the services through



ill-health of the highly influential Richard Thomas, vice chairman and chief spokesman on planning and housing issues, while Harry Downie, already sub-editor of the newsletter, has taken over as Treasurer from the very efficient Arnold Allen. Barbara Ouston, our conscientious and very able Membership Secretary for some years and Steve Gledhill, our astute and sharp-eyed Press Officer, have also resigned because of the pressure of other commitments. Caroline Fleming gallantly joins the committee as Steve's replacement while two other stalwarts, Helen Clothier and John Harris, both with exceptionally strong experience in the important health and social welfare field, have also been elected to the committee. A full list of the officers and committee has been printed and included with this edition of the newsletter. If you have a clock on the mantelpiece, stick this card behind it for ease of reference.

Penny Ayres, who runs the 'awards' judging group announced this year's winners, details of which may be found on page four – and thus the 'Celebration' was, well, celebrated, with good time fore and aft of the legal niceties for people to talk and look at the schools competition exhibition. The Society owes a real debt to Rothamsted Research – whose Associate Director Stephen James gave an illustrated and illuminating talk on the development of the Rothamsted Campus to round off the evening pleasingly – for their hospitality and help during both the schools competition awards ceremony and the evening a.g.m and 'Celebration'. And much credit redounds on Ron Taylor, The Society's Publicity Officer, for his zealously effective masterminding of both events.

Intervention sets up Public Meeting to debate House Building issues.

During Chris Marsden's review of the year he mentioned Councillor Julian Daly in reference to his stewardship of the district's planning and housing development. Julian intervened advising that the district was obliged to build 436 new housing units annually. This was challenged by Joanne Whitehead a leading member of the Harpenden Green Belt Association, arguing deftly that the District Council were under no such legal compulsion. Following several questions from the floor it was agreed to hold a public meeting with Julian and Joanne kindly agreeing to speak. Mike Peters the CEO of Jarvis Homes has also joined the panel.

June 12th. 7.30pm Rothamsted Conference Centre.

Book your tickets at the Society web site before all the seats are taken.

The Harpenden in Question

being a series of editorial commentaries on important Harpenden issues that should challenge thought and encourage inquiry and action.

13. 'The Ruin of all Happiness'



You may be one of the 34,000 drivers edging down the A1081 on any working day, at peak hours that's one every four seconds...you are very likely one of the town's 22,500 car owners, undertaking 25,000 'trips' a day, viz there and back, often over pot-holed surfaces...and finding parking increasingly difficult, not least at the home base, where the road and, frequently, the pavement is the chosen nestling spot for 90% of the time...you could be one of the 18% of the town's employed population who travel by train to work, who, reinforced by out-of-town rail-users, constitute some 3,000 daily commuters who contribute to the 2,400 traffic movements in and out of the station approaches daily...perhaps you are one of those parents that ensure 43% of Harpenden pupils are chauffeured to and from school...you could, of course, be an intrepid cyclist although specified cycle ways are not in profusion...you are hardly likely to be numbered among the very few who attempt to take a bus ride in or around the town...how ardently we must love our buses if absence makes the heart grow fonder...

All in all, you may echo the words of Mr Meadows in Fanny Burney's 1782 novel Cecilia, 'travelling is the ruin of all happiness'.

Transport is the blood stream of civil society. People have either to be conveyed to services and facilities, or to other people, and vice versa. If it is not fluid and becomes clogged, then the whole system collapses. Before the advent of the railways after 1830, when the average number of transport journeys undertaken per head was four a year, a commentator spoke of a population that was 'chained to the spot'. Over the last three years The Harpenden Society has attempted to analyse and treat with all sectors of the town's civic life and it has usually found two or three basic questions – the Red House in respect of health; the pressure on primary and secondary places in respect of education are examples – in most fields.

Transport is different. It is much more diffuse; indeed it evidently effects all those other areas of enquiry. There is a mesh of intertwining elements to be considered. Nothing demonstrated this better than the public meeting on this subject, reported in the previous edition of The Harpenden Society News. As Donald Robertson, who conducts our Transport Working Group with a quiet and sane resolution, ruefully said, 'we have an embarrassment of issues'.

The Working Group, with limited resources, has decided that, rather than swirling around in this maze-like tangle of issues, it should determine on a small number of points which, over a year, it might manage to have some influence for good and to this end it is in the

throes of drawing up a 'Forward Plan'. Initially, it has identified the **'station approach' problem**, where, typical of this mixture of issues, there is a confusion of private cars, cyclists, taxis and pedestrians, for attention. **Other likely priorities are parking in the Avenues, Amenbury Lane, Crabtree lane, Roundwood and other specific roadways; the bus service from Luton to St Albans and the question of information at bus stops, and the Nickey Line development.**



We shall, of course, attempt to update you on any progress made in these regards and you may also contact our transport spokesman, using the committee data accompanying the newsletter.

Meanwhile let us take some small comfort in the notion that hope and anticipation are often better than reality in the well-known quotation from Robert Louis Stevenson's *Virginibus Puerisque*, published in 1881; 'little do you know your own blessedness, for to travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive and the true success is to labour.'

At least, it is a bit more optimistic than Mr Meadows.

Eric Midwinter

Please send comments on this article or any other issues raised in this edition to the editor:

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Published by The Harpenden Society, printed by
Dor2Dor, Harpenden and distributed by hard-working
Society members.

Crime Prevention Corner

As per usual, our intrepid contributor, Alan Jackson, Convenor of The Society's Public Order Working Group, passes on some useful tips about crime in and around the town.

Burglary Patrol

He reports that the response of the police to the increasing number of burglaries in Harpenden has been to put a number of police 'units' on burglary patrols and that successful detections and deterrence have resulted from this initiative. The police want all citizens to supplement their efforts by alerting them on 101 if we see people taking a suspicious interest in properties or by calling 999 if people are seen actually trying to gain entry. We are also advised to double lock doors and to leave a room light on - not a hallway light - possibly on a timer.

Scam Watch

Scams involving individuals assuming false identities continue to be a problem. Police attended a suspicious incident in Sun Lane on 5 February when an elderly lady was approached by somebody claiming to represent Trading Standards: the individual concerned could produce no ID.

Our 'Public Order' items have repeatedly highlighted the need to be alert to phone scams whereby fraudsters claim to be police officers investigating fraudulent activity on people's bank accounts. They aim to get the victim to divulge their PIN and to hand over their bank cards. Two arrests were made in the District on 6 March: the suspects were 16-year old

boys from London. Remember: neither police officers nor bank staff would ever ask for personal bank account details, PIN numbers or bank cards nor would they ask you to withdraw money. It is particularly important to get this information over to older people as they appear to be the main victims of this kind of crime. Phone 101 if you're ever suspicious.

(Sociological note: one of the reasons why older people are targeted is not because all old people are vulnerable - many are very spry - but because the criminal classes, like many of us, believe the propaganda of 'ageism' and think older folk are automatically ga ga)

Sound the Hooter; a Cause for Celebration

Auto Express has examined the DVLA's driving ban figures for 2012 and has shown that Harpenden has the best behaved drivers in the UK. Alan Jackson says 'for those of us who observe the behaviour of drivers in the town centre day after day, that fact may seem a little astonishing: but perhaps those inconsiderate drivers we occasionally see don't actually live here.' The fact is that in 2012 only 19 of Harpenden's 23,347 motorists (0.08%) picked up a driving ban (the overall figure for London was 0.37%).

'Although such figures may at first be thought of as nothing much more than a statistical aberration,' says Alan, 'that's emphatically not the case. It's a record the town can be justifiably proud of. It surely helps to make the town a better place in which to live.'



Rewarding Awards

A traditional and welcome part of our annual general meeting is the announcement of the Harpenden Society Awards for the year 2013. Long-serving Society Committee member Penny Ayres, who chairs the Awards Committee with discreet aplomb, explained to the audience that the aim of these awards is to recognise developments which have enhanced the local area of Harpenden and which are of architectural merit or of historic or other public interest or which contribute visually or socially to the locality.

For 2013 there had been, she continued, seven nominations, all very interesting in their own ways. After earnest deliberation, the Awards Committee had decided to make three awards.

Firstly, a **Letter of Commendation**: this went to **Red Gables**, a house which is part of the Rothamsted estate and which is visible from West Common. It has recently been renovated inside and outside with smart new paint and newly repainted gates. The house was built in 1907 and was built by and was the home and studio of Frank Salisbury, Harpenden's famous portrait painter and stained glass designer. There is a stained glass window of his design (although the original was stolen) just visible from the road.

Secondly, a **Certificate of Merit**: this was awarded to **St Hilda's School** in Douglas Road for their new extension which has been designed and built to blend in with the original structure and is in keeping with the surrounding properties.

Lastly, the prestigious award of the **The Harpenden Society Plaque**: this was given to **The Harpenden Common Golf Club** for their new clubhouse on East Common. It was designed by the local architects rdt. It is constructed of black boarding and the judges think its barn-like appearance fits in well with the rural surroundings.

Penny Ayres went on to explain that The Society's Chairman would present these Awards to the recipients at a later date. She concluded by thanking her Committee colleagues, John Davis, Mike Waddilove and Anthony Steel for their wise input and for their help in making these difficult decisions. Penny Ayres also thanked all the members of The Harpenden Society and general public for their suggestions and nominations.



*Above top: Harpenden Common Golf Club's new clubhouse
Above middle: The extension at St. Hilda's School
Above: Red Gables*

Harpenden in World War I

This is the topical theme for the Local History Society's quarterly exhibition to be held at Park Hall 2.30 – 4.30 pm Saturday 14 June. It promises to be of much interest.

'Hail Harpendonia!' -1159 Times Over

What a joyous occasion it was. The Rothamsted Research conference hall was packed with children, parents and teachers on Wednesday 26 March for the awards ceremony for this the second of The Society's annual primary schools creative arts competition. There were light refreshments and a chance to view the exhibition of the winning entries – and the exhibition was held over for the evening 'Celebration' and A.G.M. event.

The children had been invited to imagine that 'Harpendonia' was an independent country or nation – and the panel of judges was asked to consider two elements; the artistry of the work done and the sense it showed of a civic awareness. As well as Eric Midwinter, chairman of the judges, the panel included artist Drew Wilson, writer Amanda Thomas, photographer Jeanette Lendon and Diana Godden a doyenne of the Harpenden arts scene. Ten of Harpenden's thirteen schools participated: Crabtree Infants; Crabtree Juniors; Grove Juniors; High Beeches; Manland; Sauncey Wood; Roundwood; St Dominic's; St Nicholas's; and Wood End.

As last year, hundreds of children entered and all have received a certificate: no less than ONE THOUSAND ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY NINE of them.

The children are divided into three age groups and there are five categories: art, drama, music, photography and writing. The schools make their internal assessment and send forward the winners in each of the fifteen categories for the town-wide judging. Almost fifty awards were made at the ceremony, amid much cheering and applause, and The Society was delighted that Allan Roberts, manager of W.H.Smith the sponsors of the competition, was present to give the children their certificates. In addition, and with a major contribution from The Society coffers, every school received a £40 **W.H.Smith's** voucher and a large goody-bag of art materials, with a mobile phone prize from **fonehouse** going to Roundwood Primary for having the most entries.



Three special judges' awards were made for excellent entries that embraced more than one discipline; a new and intriguing 'national' sport for Harpendonia created by St. Dominic's ; members of the Mulberry class at Grove Junior School who combined to produce a marvellous brochure for the Harpendonia tourist

industry and a splendid collection of stamps from Sauncey Wood Primary.



There was a mouth-watering Sauncey Wood cake baked and iced in the shape of a flag, a model of the White House for the president, an eye-catching version of 'Harpendopoly' and 'the Treasures of Harpendonia'. There were musical items, including an imperious national anthem, which were played at the awards ceremony and, as last year, there was some excellent writing, for two of which items the judges added a special commendation.

One of them – a copy of 'The Harpendonia Times' had a sports column telling how Harpendonia had won the vote for the 2016 Olympics – and 'even now the Olympic Stadium is being built in Top Street Way'...

You'll understand why we can hardly wait to get next year's competition up and running.



Photos. Top. WHS's Allan Roberts presenting teachers with goody bags & above with Marie Myers of St Dominic's . Above left. Eric Midwinter standing to attention during the Harpendonia National anthem. Left. Roundwood teachers and pupils. Below. Essential viewing for guests at Celebration 2014.



Memos from Members

The debate continues with your editor's contention two issues ago that just a smidgeon of the 97.73% of the English landscape that is not built upon (UK National Eco-system Assessment 2012) might be made available for, say, 50 attractive and eco-friendly new towns to house 2.5m people as a radical solution to the housing crisis which successive governments have allowed to develop over the last generation or so.

Empty Countryside

My earliest memory of Nomansland Common, going back about 70 years, is of a neat line of stooks of wheat drying in the sun. There was not a bush or a tree in sight because this was war-time and the entire common, like many other commons, had been ploughed up and put down to food crops to replace the food sent to the bottom of the Atlantic by the U-boats.

This image comes to my mind whenever somebody starts talking about alternative uses for agricultural land, and I am sure that John Davis is right to question the planting of trees for the Heartwood forest on good wheat land (the description given by a Sandridge farmer). This new forest would be a nice heart-warming idea were it not that the UK is now only 62% self-sufficient in food and the percentage is going down. Increasing the population by immigration while simultaneously taking agricultural land out of production is a seriously bad idea when you don't have a food surplus any more.

Farming has been astonishingly productive during the last fifty years giving politicians and others the idea that it will remain so however much it is messed about. That productivity has depended mainly on the use of nitrogen fertilizer, a commodity whose production is strongly energy-dependent. The present farming picture looks stable enough at the moment, but don't assume with respect to the countryside that 'empty' means 'exploitable'.

Tom Addiscott

I am at one with Tom and also John in wishing success to the efforts to improve our agricultural self-sufficiency. What worries me is that, unless some such solution at minimal cost to the landscape as I suggest is implemented, we shall all end up sitting outdoors eating this agrarian finery; 'picnics for the homeless' might describe this dystopian future - *editor*

Don't miss the next Society Public Meeting.
June 12. 7.30pm at Rothamsted Conference Centre.
Full details on the Society web site

Memos to Members

Summer visit to Annabels Farm Kinsbourne Green

Wednesday 25th June 2014
5.30pm to 8.00pm

Ian Pigott has kindly agreed for a group of Harpenden Society members to visit Annabels Farm on Wednesday 25th June. On arrival Ian will give a short presentation describing the farm and the farm school which he has set up to inspire children from the local area and inner cities to learn about food, farming and the importance of healthy habitats for wildlife. Afterwards there will be an opportunity to explore the farm and have some refreshments. As there will be a limited number of places available will members please visit the Society's website to book a place on the visit.

The Thriving High Street

The first meeting of Harpenden Retailers on April 16 proved to be very productive with two working groups being set up. The first to establish links with bars, cafes, pubs, restaurants and retailers in Harpenden and encourage them to join forces with their St Albans counterparts to create a major event in Harpenden for local residents.



The second group formed of fashion, health, hair care and associated retailers are devising 'Indulgences' days to encourage local residents to experience all the new and exciting products and services they have to offer with a series of events in the town during July.

The 'Harpenden Shopping' Facebook page is being extended to encourage more retailers to show what they have to offer and make it a focal point of information for Harpenden residents. A Facebook workshop is being set up to help those retailers who need some technical assistance.
www.facebook.com/HarpendenShopping.