

# NEWSHEET



NUMBER TWENTY ONE

APRIL 1983

ROMSEY

AND DISTRICT SOCIETY

## NEW CHAIRMAN'S AIMS - To the Future?

Looking at the aims of the Romsey and District Society as presented on the membership form, my attention was drawn to two statements of intent. One was: 'To undertake, by all means in its power, the improvement of the environment...', the other: 'To encourage positively the prosperity of the area'. Both of these statements indicate the Society's willingness to take up the challenge when these or other aspects of Romsey life are 'under threat'.

In the light of recent experiences, it may be asked: 'Why do we bother, when we appear to have little effect upon the major planning issues?' It must appear to some that when it comes to the future development of the town, the people have very little say in their future, or if they do have a say, very little notice is taken of it in terms of the final outcome.

I do not propose to tread the old ground of Halterworth again for it, together with other issues, are now beyond our reach. Problems of a similar nature are occurring, and will continue to occur and we should use our past experience to help influence the way we deal with current conditions and not as an excuse for not trying again.

Letters in the local press indicate that 'land surplus to educational requirement' may be used for housing.

Faced with the prospect of an increasing population this act would be, to say the least, shortsighted for it is more open space, more recreational space and not less that will be required by the increased population. The 'quality of life' enjoyed by a community is difficult to measure until that quality is nonexistent, rather like a river which becomes polluted and lifeless. An investment in open space is an investment for the future; we cannot continue 'stripping' the valuable open-space assets without paying a penalty. This penalty may be the curse of future generations for selling their environmental birthright.

In Romsey, an historic market town, someone seems determined to remove all open space near to the centre of the town and so, in answer to the question 'Why bother?' we must surely reply 'Because we care'.

### INCLUDE YOUNG PEOPLE

At the recent AGM, an observation was made that the majority of the members were middle-aged. This is somewhat worrying and, although in the past we have encouraged the schools to join in our activities, few young people have become members. It is not a Society for the middle-aged, it is for the people of Romsey and District, and that does include young people. What may be

worth while is the formation of a Young Romsey and District Society, or call it what you will, which would meet some of the needs of young people, whilst at the same time securing the future of the Society. We do understand that they may want to 'do their own thing' and so long as it was within the Society's constitution we would give our support and help. I am therefore asking young people over the age of fourteen to contact me and, if there is sufficient interest, we will set up the first meeting.

### PERMANENT HEADQUARTERS

Finally, the one problem which at the moment seems insoluble is that of a permanent headquarters. At present we meet in King John's House which, although it is a wonderful building, is not quite the same as having our own accommodation. If we did have an office and committee room, I am sure it would enable us to operate more effectively and to provide access to the Society on Saturday mornings for members of the public.

It would be a pleasant thought that at the end of my two years as chairman we might have more young people in the Society, have protected some of our open spaces, and found a home of our own.

*David Young*

## PLANNERS ARE PIRATES! By John King

The Planning Departments are the Pirates of the land upon which we live and seek to build our homes, our businesses and our recreational activities. As in yesteryear, they plunder the weak and avoid the strong and, where a frontal attack may be dangerous, employ identical delaying and hit and run tactics.

I need hardly remind readers of this Newsheet that Romsey is a conservation area containing many beautiful buildings. Not one of these buildings was built with the "help" or "advice" of a Planner or a Planning Authority; if they had, we would not now be trying to conserve them; they would have fallen down decades ago. The majority of these buildings were built by individual entrepreneurs with flair and panache: the very people the Pirate Planners of today would seek to destroy.

Have you ever stopped to think how many jobs per year a single Planning Officer destroys or prevents from being created? In my view it runs into many hundreds.

I have travelled the world widely and seen many countries where there are no Planning Officers and little, if any, Planning restrictions: where often consent to build or otherwise is at the discretion of the Mayor or his (or her) Deputy. The environment does not appear to suffer in these countries; indeed, quite the contrary.

The editor would like to bring to readers' attention that signed articles in the Newsheet generally reflect the opinions of an individual, whilst unsigned articles are generally the opinion of the Society and Committee  
C. A. McCormick



### TOURIST INFORMATION CENTRE

You want an example? The T.V.B.C. could and should have funded a Tourist Information Centre two years ago but the Planners decided they wanted a report (Desk Study) and this took two years to produce. It told us little if anything we did not know before and now they want another six months for various Committees to discuss it before even a decision is forthcoming, and who knows what that decision may be? I know of another decision which took ten years to reach, and the year after it had been reached the applicant had not even been informed!

You may think I have an antipathy towards Planning Officers - not so. I number three as personal friends and know that within the confines of their Union and their Employer they are for the most part hard working and people of integrity. They are not all that way and one rotten apple in a basket can and does cause havoc.

### FEED ON THE WEAK

Remember the Pirate Planners feed on the weak. The Councils, Nationalised Industries and even Farmers can in many instances build without the restrictions that are placed upon the individual.

The Planners are creating jobs for themselves, or more work for the same number of Planners in order that they can delay things even longer than they do already. They spread their net far and wide into such areas as Recreation, Tourism, Industry, Energy, Exploration and many other spheres in which they have little or no expertise.

### MUST BE SCRAPPED

One only has to compare the County Council with the Borough Council to see just how differently the Law can be interpreted. They are all bogged down in a quagmire of complicated, time-consuming, expensive and, in many cases, unnecessary legislation, the like of which appears nowhere else in the world.

Sooner or later the whole lot must be scrapped and we must start again from scratch. If we do not, the sea of legislation upon which the plundering Pirate Planners thrive will become unsafe for us all.

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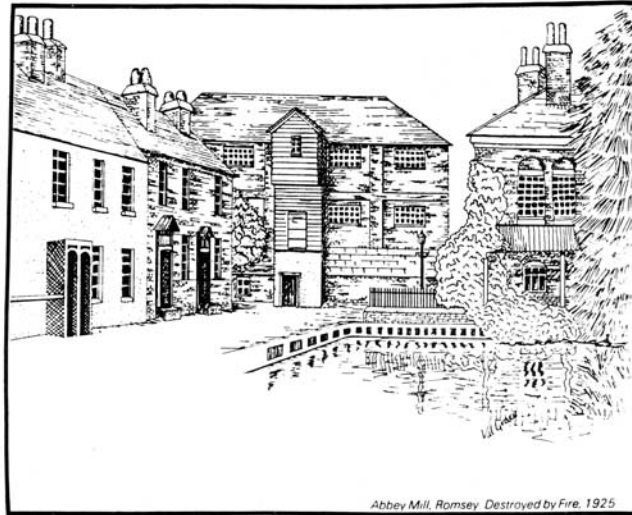
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## Successful Annual General Meeting . . .

The Society's Annual General Meeting was held on Wednesday 16th February at the Abbey Hall. Frank Akerman completed his two year term of office as Chairman and David Young was elected in his place, with John King as Vice Chairman. Dr Akerman presented Mrs Aldyth Wellington, our retiring President, with an eighteenth century print of Romsey Abbey and thanked her for all her hard work and enthusiasm since her election as the Society's first President in 1976. Dr Peter Johnson, having been proposed by Mrs Wellington as our new President, was duly elected: Dr Johnson was born in Romsey, has been a General Practitioner in the town for forty years, and has been Chairman of the Buildings Trust since its formation.

The retiring Chairman thanked Rob Waters for his outstanding contribution to the Society as both Treasurer and Membership Secretary, and also Jill Maddick for her excellent minutes. Now that the Town Hall Community Centre has become a reality, Sylvia Robinson and John White are standing down from the Executive Committee and special tribute was paid to them for their help to the Society. George Prescott, present Chairman of the Waterways Sub-committee, was the only new election to the committee. The members of the Executive Committee for the coming year are: Frank Akerman, Nigel Bachmann, Betty Burnett, Ron Genge, Chris Mather, George Prescott, Gill Roberts, Jack Smethan, John Wattie and Don Hargreaves.

The Waterways Committee reported the completion of the Barge Canal as a canoe facility. Two public stream clearings had also taken place, thanks to those whose efforts had produced 'slightly cleaner streams around our lovely townf.



Abbey Mill, Romsey. Destroyed by Fire. 1925

Local artist Val Grace has again kindly completed three line drawings of historic but, alas, now no longer existent mills, namely: Mead Mill, Duke's Mill and Abbey Water Mill. Copies of these prints are now available.

The interests and problems of the Planning and Townscape Committee are many: Town Centre Plan, Minerals Ex-traction Local Plan, South Hants Structure Plan and Romsey Area Plan were the major issues, and the Society's views on all these had been made clear. In addition, the Committee had done survey work on the decision to introduce car parking charges and kept a watch on planning applications.

The buildings Preservation Trust reported that progress in Cherville Street had been slow but steady: No. 59.61 had been converted into a single house and had been sold. No. 63 should be completed by May and work on the two remaining

houses should finish by the end of this year. The Trust unsuccessfully bid for the two derelict Georgian Houses in Winchester Road and would, as always, welcome information about similar properties.

The Footpath Committee had successfully launched the 'Check a mile of path' scheme, with twenty-one miles already listed. Country walking had been made easier by such activities as erecting signposts and clearing overgrown foliage and field headlands. Footpaths are used regularly in guided walks and the Committee's publications: 'Romsey District Rambles' and 'Roundabout Romsey', are selling well.

The Social Committee looked back on a busy year of planning Social Events ranging from a variety of lectures to 'Poetry for Pleasure' evenings and summer lunchtime concerts. A major event was the Summer Party at the Old Barns at Michelmersh, which was preceded by many hours of tidying-up, planning and arranging.

Some success with tree-planting was reported by the Tree Committee, but the County had refused permission for planting by roadsides. The Chairman commented on the 'savage treatment' given to trees round the Abbey Garth by the T.V.B.C.

The Newsheet, produced three times during 1982 depended on the hard work of Camilla McCormick and her band of helpers. This year, Camilla wishes to take less responsibility, owing to other commitments, though she is willing to help.

A Statement of Accounts was circulated and the Treasurer presented a satisfactory report, but wished for more members so as to increase receipts.

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## AFTER THIS PLAN, THE NEXT - Who Calls the Tune?

When we mount our hobby horse and begin to pontificate about restricting the growth of Romsey, our critics put the pertinent question: "How long have these people lived in Romsey?" We then have to admit that, though some of our members were born and bred in the town, most of us came here during the last ten, twenty, or thirty years. The inference follows from that admission that it is the old case of "Haul up the ladder, Jack, I'm inboard." Thus discredited, other counters are made to our protests, such as: we are denying to others the benefits we enjoy; more people with more purchasing power will increase the town's commercial prosperity; more people to share the burden means lower rates; the only alternative to growth is stagnation and decline. But in the end, we, that is the whole community, have to decide what we really want - what our priorities are.

One of the opposing arguments, that which sees decline as the alternative to growth, has to be answered, and then, apart from the question of one's antecedents, the remainder fall into place. We do not expect, nor would we want, nil growth. Our protest is about the speed with which it is happening. As evidence, the Area Plan statistics will bear repeating. In 1971, the population of Romsey was 10,500, ten years later it had risen to 12,800. The planned increase for the next ten years is 1,200 houses plus 'infill', say 4,000 people giving a population of 16,800 by 1991, an increase of 60% in 20 years.

We have said this is too much and we should look at the effects of achieving the targets. At Cupernham, the flat and open field that runs from the canal to the ridge at Cupernham Lane is to be filled except for some nominal patches of public open space; at Halterworth the tongue of steep land, part scrub, part pasture, and with a stream meandering through, is to be halved and severed from the open country by a new substantial outlier of housing. The eastward bulge is swelling in a lopsided and deformed fashion because of the topographical, policy and ownership restraints to the west and south - restraints which in themselves are welcome and which should in fact be allowed to dictate a limit to the town's extent, not only there but also to the north and east.

For those of you who do not have a copy of the Draft Area Plan, it might be helpful to set down here the figures presented. In 1977 Romsey was committed by planning approvals or by policy allocations to the addition of 1,050 houses to its built-up area. By 1982, 370 of these had been built and there remained 600 still to be built to complete the total commitment. (Not perfect arithmetic but there had meanwhile been some revision of densities. The distribution of this 600 among the various sites, some of which are now in course of construction, is as follows:

Cupernham	330
Great Woodley Farm	60
School Road, Woodley	30
Tadburn Nursery	<u>180</u>
Total	600

The Structure Plan proposed a further 600 houses to fulfil what is termed "minor growth" during the 1980s and the distribution of these, taken from the Draft Area Plan, is intended to be:

Cupernham	220
Halterworth	160
The Hundred	30
Love Lane	30
Montfort	80
Southampton Road	<u>80</u>
Total	600

The revision of the Structure Plan, which extends the Plan period to 1996, deals gently with Romsey and there appears to be little addition to the numbers included in the earlier version. Although parallel with the major development sites there is a less precisely defined number from "infill" developments of ten houses or less, adding a further 400 houses in the Southern Test Valley area.

Well that, you may feel, is that, and there is no possibility of getting these figures changed. But remember these are allocations of building land; it still needs a builder or developer who wants to build the houses. Not that we can expect any reprieve from that quarter - the famous 'demand' exists, or can be fairly readily created.

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The signs are with us already. Applications are now being made for permission to build houses on several parcels of land not envisaged as being for housing in the Area and Structure Plans. Land at the back of Montfort College which was not included in the Montfort Brief has entered the lists and if this application succeeds, 12 houses will be added to the 80 allocated in the Brief. A bigger threat to moderation is that posed by the County council's release of land owned by them and some publicity has been given recently to the relinquishing of school playing fields for housing: ten acres at Romsey County Infants School, an unspecified area at the County Junior School, five acres, possibly, at Mountbatten School, ten acres at Ringwood Drive, North Baddesley, reserved for educational purposes but now to be sold; these are all extra to the Area Plan and could be worth another 300-400 houses.

Correspondents to the Advertiser have made the point that here, in the release of this land, is the opportunity to fulfil Romsey's need for more playing fields, more public open space, and we think that this idea should be looked at very closely indeed. We refuse to accept the premise that County owned land must be allowed, on sale, to realise the highest possible price, but how can we

influence the Council's decisions? Lobbying is our time-honoured way, electing a representative sympathetic to our views is another and, with the forthcoming election of a new Country Councillor for Romsey, an opportunity has arisen in that direction. Either way, it has to be clear to the Council members, both County and Borough, that a large part of the population of the town feels strongly about the fate that is being foisted upon them. The Society, in the shape of the Executive Committee, is making its protest but the impact of members is very important and as many individual members as possible should act positively

I have not mentioned that other feeble justification for apathy that one hears from time to time: "People have got to live somewhere". If people are living, they will be somewhere. the causes for population migrations are too complex for us to invent theories of inevitability and Romsey need feel under no obligation to contribute to

I have not mentioned that other feeble justification for apathy that one hears from time to time: "People have to live somewhere". If people are living, they will be somewhere. the causes for population migrations are too complex for us to invent theories of inevitability and Romsey need feel under no obligation to contribute to the engrandisement of giant nationwide firms of housebuilders.

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## SUBSCRIPTIONS !!!

As reported at the AGM in February, Mrs B Chowienczyk, 8 Church Road, Abbey Close, Romsey, Tel: 517668, has kindly agreed to act as Membership secretary from 1st March 1983.

This will mean that applications for membership and payment of subscriptions should be made to Mrs Chowienczyk and not to the Treasurer as hitherto.

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