

Romsey & District Society

talks - excursions - walks - poetry readings - dinners - wine tastings - garden parties - magazine

Turn to page 15 for details of forthcoming Society events

Thursday 27 January
"150 Years of the Lady with the Lamp"
(with LTVAS in Town Hall)

Saturday 5 February
Quiz Night
with Ploughman's Supper

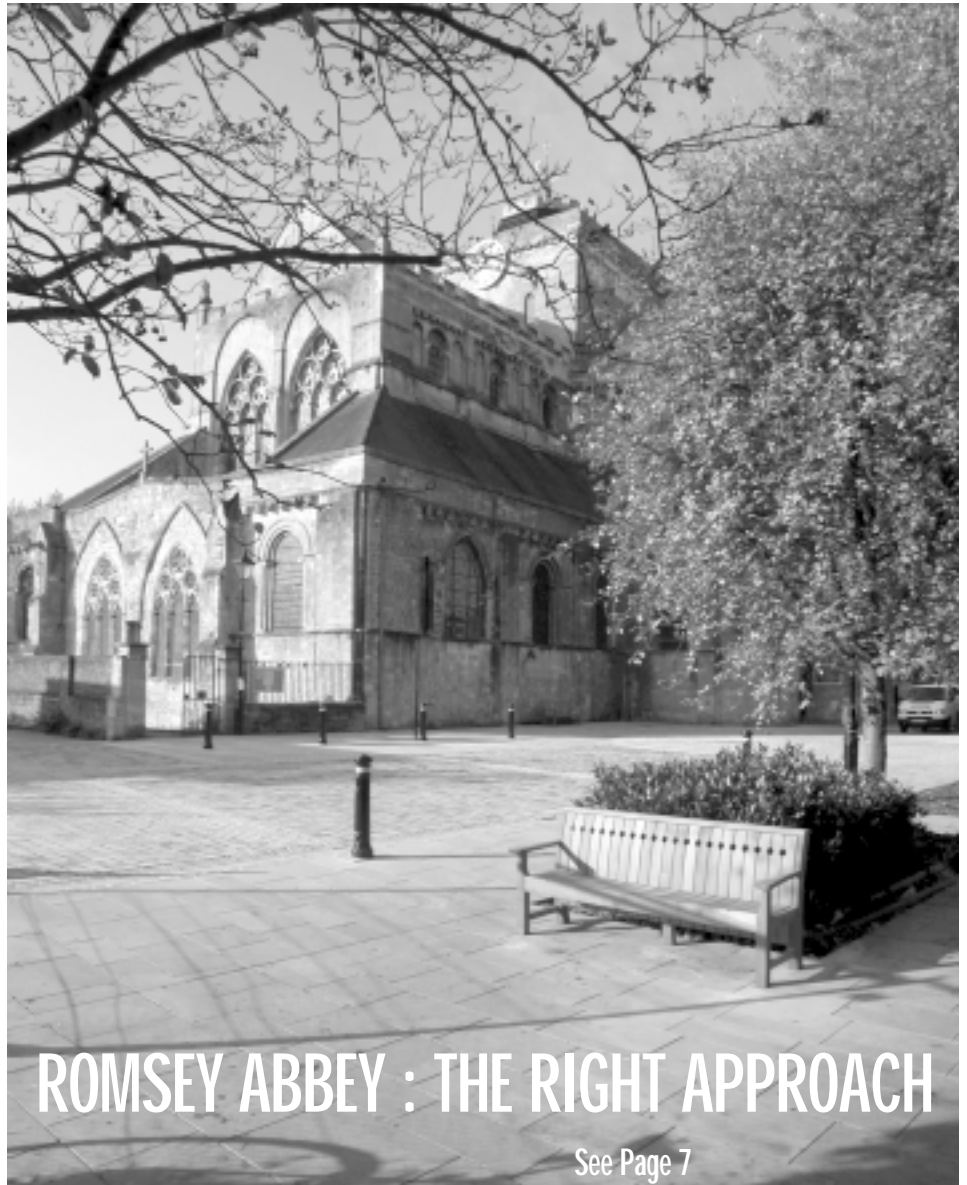
Tuesday 15 February
Annual General Meeting

Tuesday 8 March
Coach Trip to Florence
Nightingale Museum

Thursday 14 April
Annual Lecture
Revd Canon Neil Crawford-Jones

Wednesday 18 May
Annual Dinner

Early booking recommended for the Quiz, London visit, Lecture and Dinner



ROMSEY ABBEY : THE RIGHT APPROACH

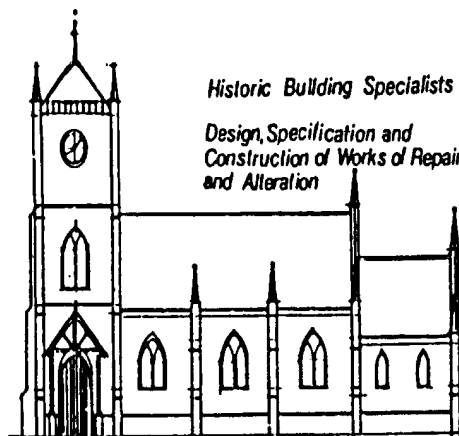
See Page 7

PHOTO Neill Beasley

oops!

Subscriptions were due in November
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Chairman's Column

As the "best lights of any of the local towns" come on again in Romsey, it seems that the Christmas Season is here again. For me it seems to come earlier each year but that is because I am just getting older and grumpier. May I, though, belatedly wish you all the compliments of the season.

As I walk through the town I see three sites that still disturb me.

Firstly, it is a pity that the new store at the old Waitrose site did not open as originally promised in October. It would have been good to have the extra parking and shopping space in time for Christmas. What I now have noticed is a huge hole where the car park was and recently the footings to the buildings of the Jam Factory (of blessed memory) could be viewed.

Secondly, the development of the old British Legion site seems to be stuck

decorating the junction of Latimer Street and The Hundred. One day last month I approached a number of County Council employees, dressed in smart suits, who were standing on the corner, viewing the mess. I complained to them, and they told me that all the street furniture is subject to extremely detailed and precise regulations laid down by the Ministry of Transport and the Regions and nothing can be changed except by permission from central Government! This of course I believe to be due to the regrettable modern 'Blame Culture'. For if an accident occurs of any kind and the signs are not exactly in line with the specifications, then a guilty person may be able to escape punishment.

I am glad to say that English Heritage have launched a *Save our Streets* campaign to try to get some rational answers to the clutter. For example, does each and every sign have to have a separate pole? (An article dealing with this campaign appears in page 12).

Brian Palmer



fast, which spoils the nice development of Latimer Street. I have been told on good authority that it has turned into a legal wrangle between the parties involved and so I cannot offer any view on when we shall see the rebuilding start. As always a legal wrangle will probably take a long time to resolve. Meanwhile, Latimer Street and the whole town waits.

Which brings me nicely back to Latimer Street. It is possible to count at least eight sign poles of various sorts

If you would like more information about the campaign, visit:

English Heritage at www.english-heritage.org.uk/saveourstreets or email saveourstreets@english-heritage.org.uk or telephone 0870-333-1181 .

National Federation of Women's Institutes at www.womens-institute.org.uk or email hq@nfwl.org.uk or telephone 020 7371 9300.

PLANNING MATTERS

The Brewery Site, Abbotswood and the Great Guildford Threat

Chris Amery, Chairman of the Society's Planning Subcommittee, reviews recent and forthcoming events.

The first thing is to celebrate victory in the battle of Duttons Road. The Council offices will not move to Andover, or close down. Along with numerous others we did our bit, writing to all councillors on the TVBC Executive Committee. Apart from the obvious general points about the impact on Romsey, we also highlighted the specific issue of the need to view planning applications on paper. We simply do not believe that current technology can provide anything like a satisfactory screen-based alternative.

On the Brewery site, our call in June for compulsory purchase and a competition may have helped to galvanise the developer into appointing new architects and advisers. They are in discussion with TVBC over a new scheme and we await the details, perhaps with some hope.

Meanwhile the public inquiry into the Borough Local Plan continues, with our main issues being the reserve allocation of 500 houses at Abbotswood, and the designation of Ganger Farm for sports pitches and a pavilion complex.

But much more worrying is that the Local Plan itself, and the housing numbers on which it is based, will be overtaken in the medium and longer term by the South East Plan now being prepared and voted on in Guildford by the South East England Regional Assembly, our new strategic planning authority. John Prescott's target for the region is 36,000 houses a year throughout the entire plan period up to 2026, and although the Assembly has formally voted to reject that, its own figure will be either 28,000 or 32,000. The fear is that Hampshire will have to take a large (perhaps disproportionate) fraction of them, and the resulting difficulties threaten to make the arguments about Abbotswood look like very small beer.

We may be in for a long and difficult road if we want to retain the essential character of the market town we know and love, and its surrounding villages.

Change

Romsey is changing before our eyes and several articles in this issue consider how some of these changes are working out. You will find here assessments of the new work to the Abbey approach and the changes in Latimer Street, as well as reports on the general issue of historic market towns and the condition of Romsey.

The easy response to change is to embrace it wholeheartedly because it is new or to oppose wholeheartedly for the same reason. Easiest of all is to shrug one's shoulders helplessly and simply hope for the best.

None of these responses, however, is likely to produce a happy result.

Why is it that so much is going on now? Perhaps to answer that we need to go back to Romsey's post-war expansion a generation ago. For a hundred years the population of the town had been more or less stable, hovering at around six thousand people. Except for single buildings being renewed or rebuilt and the odd flurry of terraced housing triggered off by the railway, nothing much happened. Then at a stroke, development to the eastern side of the town almost trebled the population.

In principle, new citizens are something to celebrate. They bring with them new business into the town, more children to its schools, more ratepayer's money to supply its services. Yet at roughly the same time as this expansion, Strong's brewery left Romsey, leaving behind a complex of industrial buildings on a prime site, right in the heart of the town. The new industrial sites off Greatbridge Road attempted to redress the employment problem this created, but to this day most of the brewery site remains undeveloped and neglected.

Meanwhile, private and industrial traffic on the roads was everywhere, every year, on the increase. At times it seemed that more than a fair share of this was winding its way through Romsey, damaging

bridges, clogging up the town centre and generally making life for the pedestrian shopper both miserable and dangerous. Many of the new residents on the outskirts of Romsey found it easier to do their weekly shop elsewhere. Though restaurants and offices multiplied and prospered, sections of the town's retailers were having a hard time. Some were really in the doldrums. Inevitably the time came when the town had to respond to these different pressures if it were not to wither on the branch.

Romsey is an historic market town and the dangers threatening such towns have been well documented by the Council for the Preservation of Rural England and in a recent government White Paper. The conference held in Romsey this September, which we report on, addressed the threat at national level, evidence of how seriously it is being taken. John Davies quotes, not from the Civic Society Trust, where one might expect to find such thinking, but from the Rural White Paper 2000:

'Every day countless decisions are made that have the potential to make a piece of a town more attractive, welcoming and pleasant, or a little more hostile, unpleasant or unsafe, to erode or add to the character.'

The Society's role (and that of its local councils) is to make sure that these changes improve the life of the town without damaging its character. Street signs, shop fronts, street furniture of all sorts including, above all, street lighting, unsightly overhead wires - no detail is too small to be of consequence. The Society has working parties looking closely at these issues but we need our members to join them in being constantly observant and forthright. We must be clearcut and eloquent about what we like and what we don't. When it comes to the struggle to preserve the town's character, there is no room on the fence; just as, if there must be changes in Romsey, there should be no room for the bland or the second-rate.

Paul Gardner



Our readers will have been among those who visited King John's House during the recent exhibition of craft work put on for National Maintenance Week. They will have seen there craftsmen working in wood and stone; cabinetmakers, sculptors, roofers, tilers, interior decorators and stained glass specialists, several of them demonstrating their skills.

The purpose of the exhibition, sponsored by The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, was to advise and encourage owners of older properties on proper care. Howard Jenkins gave a helpful closing talk bringing together the essential lessons.

David Jeffery, a loyal member of the Society and a regular advertiser in our paper, was the organiser of this unusual and distinguished event. Our photograph shows the portico to Temple Court House which David recently and splendidly restored in a major conservation exercise.

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Welcoming Spirit at Greatwell Drive

For centuries people have gone to the Greatwell Drive area of Romsey when they have needed help. Today it is a kinder place than it was in the past. Now it is the location of Nightingale Lodge (a residential home for older people), the day centre the Master's House, the NHS Nightingale Surgery and, across the pavement, a Red Cross centre. Nightingale Lodge and Master's House, both run by Hampshire County Council, are bright, welcoming, friendly places.

This atmosphere contrasts with the darker past when an eighteenth-century workhouse stood on the site. Workhouses were a refuge for the very poor and it was the custom in such places to separate husbands, wives, and children. A Master's House was just that, the home of the workhouse



Nightingale lodge when used as the union workhouse. The ladies on the lawn are not, one assume in residence.

Master and it is perhaps a pity that this name has been retained. The shadow of fear cast by a workhouse lingered for many years in the memories of some older people. Dr

John Wattie, Romsey & District Society membership secretary and a retired Romsey GP, illustrates this point. He recalls an elderly patient living alone in a caravan, whose health began to fail. Dr Wattie offered to find him a place in Nightingale Lodge. The old man immediately said he was born in the workhouse and might as well die there. In fact the workhouse was closed in 1948 when the NHS and Welfare State began. It was superseded for a time by a home for the elderly called The Gardens.

John Wattie is Chairman of the League of Friends of Nightingale Lodge and Master's House. He is supported by a small committee of six.

Anyone who can contribute or would like to join the League of Friends should ring John Wattie on 322534.

Nightingale Lodge is a residential home for around forty people, mainly from Romsey and surrounding areas. It consists of five wings, named after local districts Chilworth, Ampfield, Braishfield, Embley and Dunbridge. E a c h

wing has its own rooms, lounge and dining room. Three rooms are kept for respite care for people over sixty-five who stay for a short time. Sometimes people just out of hospital will spend an intermediate period there. Some residents are physically or mentally frail.

Manager Lynne Green praises Hampshire County Council's entertainment programme at the Lodge:

"There is always something interesting going on. For example, the cameo puppets are popular, there are music CDs and a very pleasant garden. We aim to do something special at times like Easter and Christmas, with visits from local choirs or other performers. Last Christmas we went out on a tour of Romsey lights and decorations. The Library brings books to be borrowed, and we have a little shop selling sweets, toiletries and stationery. We have two resident budgies and some visitors bring in their dogs". There is a good relationship between the Lodge and Nightingale Surgery, and Lynne explained that medical staff are always willing to come across when needed and their help has been vital at times.

The Master's House Day Centre is also managed by Lynne with Jane Mayor and Julie Barber as assistant unit managers. People are referred to both places after assessment by a Care Manager. Master's House is open five days a week, serving about thirty people a day. It has its own garden, which some day-visitors enjoy tending. Again a range of entertainments is available including quizzes, crosswords, snooker and much more. There are library books to borrow and there is a small shop. Outings are organised to the seaside and other places. An impressive display of paintings and craft shows the skill of day-visitors and their teachers. Lunch is served each day and a bar sells low-cost drinks. A visiting chiropodist and hairdressers are much appreciated. School students sometimes help out, chatting or supervising games. The Centre caters for people from Romsey and the surrounding villages, an area coinciding with that of the Romsey & District Society.

Jean Denham

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Visit to Highgrove

If ever a garden reflected the personality and status of its owner and creator, then surely it must be Highgrove.



So discreet is the entrance to Prince Charles' estate of Highgrove that the coach carrying the lucky twenty-five RDS members who won the ballot swept past it and had to turn back. This was the first hint of the uniqueness of the visit, made possible by the foresight of Denise Amery and the Social Committee. If ever a garden reflected the personality and status of its owner and creator, then surely it must be Highgrove.

Strangely enough, being heir to the throne carries disadvantages for the aspiring garden-designer. Security is a big issue: there is a constant police presence there, and we were solemnly warned that we could not stray away from our guide without triggering a full security alert. When Lady Salisbury of Cranborne helped the Prince to design his first of many gardens within the grounds, the Sundial Garden, she had to accept that its proportions be decided by security systems already in place. Yet once into the grounds one is unaware of the cameras that must be hidden all around.

Prince Charles is showered with presents and many of them must be incorporated into the design. These might range from the majestic cast-iron column rescued from the demolition of the old Victoria Station to herbs from the Sussex branch of the Women's Institute. The column stands at the end of a half-mile avenue of limes the Prince has planted and is topped with a large heron-like bird of welded and gilded metal designed by Julian and Isabel Bannerman. These garden designers also worked on the Wall of Gifts on the perimeter of the woods, which is an ingenious way of using up stone-carved presents. The Sun Dial Garden, one of three areas to be redesigned in the twenty-four years of royal ownership, has the oddest manifestation of the gift problem. The topiarised yew hedge has four breaks, each containing a bust of

Prince Charles gazing over the unusual black and white planting. I think this is as much an example of wit as an exhibition of comparative portraiture.

Perhaps the two most enchanting gardens are the Walled and the Cottage Gardens. Imagine Mottisfont Rose Garden with, instead of grass, fine vegetables and fruit in small box-edged plots and a graceful stone fountain in the centre, approached through tunnels of apple trees. Two of the vegetable patches are divided diagonally by a St Andrew's cross, the other two by the cross of St George, a design devised together by the Prince and Lady Salisbury. For help with the Cottage Garden, Prince Charles turned to Rosemary Verey, who had created a famous garden nearby. She made a planting scheme based on his idea of a sinuous grass path and a working party that included Prince William and Prince Harry, as well as their father, finished the planting in a day. The result is beautiful. Imagine all your favourite cottage plants melting into each other and billowing over the paths and some particularly fine garden benches to survey them from. If, as we are told, another disadvantage of the Prince's position is to be inundated with unsolicited expert advice, it has to be said that he has had some wonderful skill, knowledge and taste to call on.

Two other areas of the garden must also be astoundingly beautiful, though since it was August we missed their seasonal display. Miriam Rothschild, a Fellow of the Royal Society and a proponent of biodiversity, seized the chance to help the Prince give over the old paddock to wild flower propagation. Photographs of the glorious result, reminiscent of the medieval tapestry of La Dame à la Licorne, are thrilling. Hebridean sheep keep the grass down until February and help to open up the ground to favour germination. Expert advice was also on hand from Westonbirt Arboretum,

whose curator advised on species for the Autumn Walk. The Highgrove arboretum is the setting for the intensely personal small, cruciform building called the Sanctuary, built to commemorate the Millennium and blessed by the Bishop of London.

There simply isn't space to describe all the gardens and features of Highgrove: the magical Stumpery; the tree house built for the young princes; the seventy-species strong National Collection of Beeches; the Tulip Walk in the royal racing colours; the Thyme Walk, bounded by golden globes of yew trimmed into deliberately eccentric shapes and rounded off by fountains at each end. If it sounds like the Chelsea Show, it will be no surprise that it includes a silver-medal garden transplanted from there, the Arabic-influenced Carpet Garden, based on rugs in Highgrove House.



What holds all these eclectic components together? The classic principles of garden design that require a relationship between the garden and the surrounding countryside and between the garden and the house; and most importantly of all - I wish I had more space to devote to it - a truly profound belief in working with, not against nature. For not only the garden but also the farm and the estate are run on strictly organic principles, held passionately by the Prince and his staff, without resort to chemicals of any kind. There is, finally, the stamp of the man himself, for it could not have been made by anyone else.

Caroline Gardner

The team originally planned to fix 12 blue plaques around the town with a budget of £3,000 of which half was provided by the Society and half by the Town Council and the Borough Council. Ten have been produced so far and by the time you read this they will all have been mounted in position. We have made a number of economies on the way so that we should be able to produce about 15 in all and still stay within budget. In the view of the team, this is about the right number for the town; the objective was simply to add interest to the town rather than to give a full account.

Initially, we sat down with TVBC Heritage Officer Frank Green to get an agreed sense of direction. Phoebe Merrick covered history, Paul Gardner architecture and Jean Denham had the unenviable task of manipulating the text within the limited space provided by a plaque. There had to be a deal of discussion within the team to decide on the sites, the style of the plaques commissioned and the commemorative text. No decision, however small, was taken without full agreement within the team.

Some of the sites selected themselves with no problem. It was not, however always so straightforward. Discovering the responsible person to approach for permission could require persistence, and it could never be assumed that owners would welcome a blue plaque on their wall, nor that one could be mounted without damage to precious fabric, nor that a readable position could readily be found.

We also studied what other people had done and this was really quite instructive. For example, the Sid Vale Society had produced around 60 plaques in an oval shape which we also adopted but theirs were made of aluminium sheet with the text printed on the surface and coated with an anti-graffiti layer. This had the advantage of being about one-third of the price of the cast aluminium version that we finally chose but had the disadvantage of beginning to look rather old after a few years.

We also felt that the legends on the Sidmouth plaques were too long, so we chose a smaller design and a fixed letter size so that the maximum length of the legend was automatically fixed. On this point, we asked English Heritage for their views. They wrote back an

encouraging letter but recommended that the plaque be made of ceramic and have the absolute minimum number of words - not much more than "John Donne lived here". We settled for a compromise, deciding on an average length of about 20 words, like most other towns.

The supplier, Leander Architectural, was a joy to deal with. Their prices were low and their service impeccable. They have a foundry in Derby and another in Wales and the business is run by Ted and Sue McAvoy. How it works is that you supply them with the text and a plaque size and they respond with a computerised layout for your approval. If that is agreed (which it always was) you place the order and they go off to

Blue Plaque



Parade

pour molten aluminium into the appropriate mould to make the base plate and to cast the letters you need. They don't work from stock. The letters are stuck on to the base plate using epoxy resin and the whole plaque is then finished, painted and baked to produce the result you see.

The same company also produced the cast iron "River Test" signs at Middlebridge Bridge and another pair where the road crosses the river on the way to Timsbury. We recommended Leander to Don Hargreaves as a supplier for the plaque remembering Peter Johnson on the new South Garth gates to the Abbey Church. He, too, was delighted with the result.

Another joy of this exercise was to meet so many nice people in the town. One such was Sheila Still at the White Horse



who has worked there for 40 years - longer than anyone else - and has seen the hotel pass through a succession of corporate owners including Trusthouse Forte, Granada, Compass and latterly Macdonalds Hotels. She really loves the old building and we were working closely with her, because at the time it was up for sale yet again. After the plaque was fixed, the hotel was sold to a group of local businessmen. Sheila was delighted that the building was now owned by people who she felt would take good care of it. She says she was so happy that she cried at the welcoming ceremony when she was introduced to the new owners. Sadlers Mill was also up for sale at the time. There was considerable anxiety that a site so precious to Romsey, but with obvious economic potential, might be acquired by the wrong sort of developer. Rumours abounded. Most of us were worried about the future of the mill, so it was with relief that we heard of a potential buyer with a serious interest in conservation. Those of us who heard Anthony de Sigley's talk at the Buildings Preservation Trust AGM about how he and his partner Sarah are developing the building can feel that this, too, has now come into safe hands.

Geoff Morris

Geoff is too modest to mention, but readers may imagine for themselves, the mountain of correspondence the blue plaque enterprise entailed. Without his persistence and enthusiasm this scheme would not have got off the ground.

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Romsey Abbey Approach

Hampshire County Council has applied funding available from the Small Towns Initiative to improve the principal approach to the Abbey from Church Street.

This approach, with tarmac road surface and concrete paving slab footpaths, had become a dreary lineal car park and the planting from a previous improvement scheme was overcrowded.

The HCC designers consulted all those living and working adjacent to this area, who became known as Stakeholders. Designers from the Stakeholders, which included Romsey and District Society and Romsey Parochial Church Council, were invited to contribute ideas. Later, Councillors from the HCC, Test Valley Borough Council and Romsey Town Council were asked for comments in addition to their normal advice to their planning committees. These discussions were more than nominal, and the HCC designers incorporated several suggestions to their already well-considered design. An Exhibition in King John's House, followed by a public ballot on the scheme, completed this very thorough consultation.

The Abbey Approach is now worthy of its name. The space has been significantly widened by reducing the trees on the north side to one per bay and providing shared pedestrian and vehicle access over the stone setts. The point where the new approach joins

the existing Purbeck-paved principal entrance to Romsey Abbey consists of stone setts laid in a large circle, defined by granite spheres. These spheres have probably caused more comment than the rest of the scheme. I think that the colour and texture of granite is alien to the softer, multi-colours of the limestones used in the Abbey, but if the bollards required in this area needed to be spherical, then granite is the most appropriate stone. The stone paving is coincident with the setts, which gives unity to the space, and the texture of the materials not only provides variety but also indicates the primary use intended for each part.

The street furniture has been selected with great care. The high quality hardwood benches, including the circular bench around one newly-



planted tree, have simple tracery reminiscent of ecclesiastical seating. The second new tree is protected by a very attractive painted iron tree guard designed and made by Richard Bent

in his inimitable style. Sadly, the original plan to introduce modern lighting luminaires was abandoned for financial reasons, and pseudo-Victorian lighting standards have been used, but at least they have been reduced in height. Traditional cast-iron type bollards have been used on either side of the new approach, with a larger number on the south side protecting the wall. The bollards on the north side are spaced so widely that cars have been seen parking on the smooth paving between them. The wide spacing must be to allow for various civic activities to take place, because each of the bollards in the Approach has its own power supply.

Signs have been put up as Regulations dictate, but do not respect the exceptional quality of environment that the designers have achieved. It is believed that the sign for "Parking for the Disabled" will be moved to the nearby lamp standard, and the additional pole, itself an unnecessary hazard, removed. The signs which are causing the most disfigurement to this very welcome new space are the "Controlled Area" signs, and the writer understands that the one nearest the Social Services building will be replaced by a bollard.

Romsey now possesses another very special outdoor meeting space, a splendid opening up, visually and actually, to the main approach of Romsey Abbey. The new paving looks very attractive at night, particularly if the stones are wet. It is hoped that it will be used for part of the Remembrance Day parades and for other civic celebrations and festive events.

J. Diane Hargreaves

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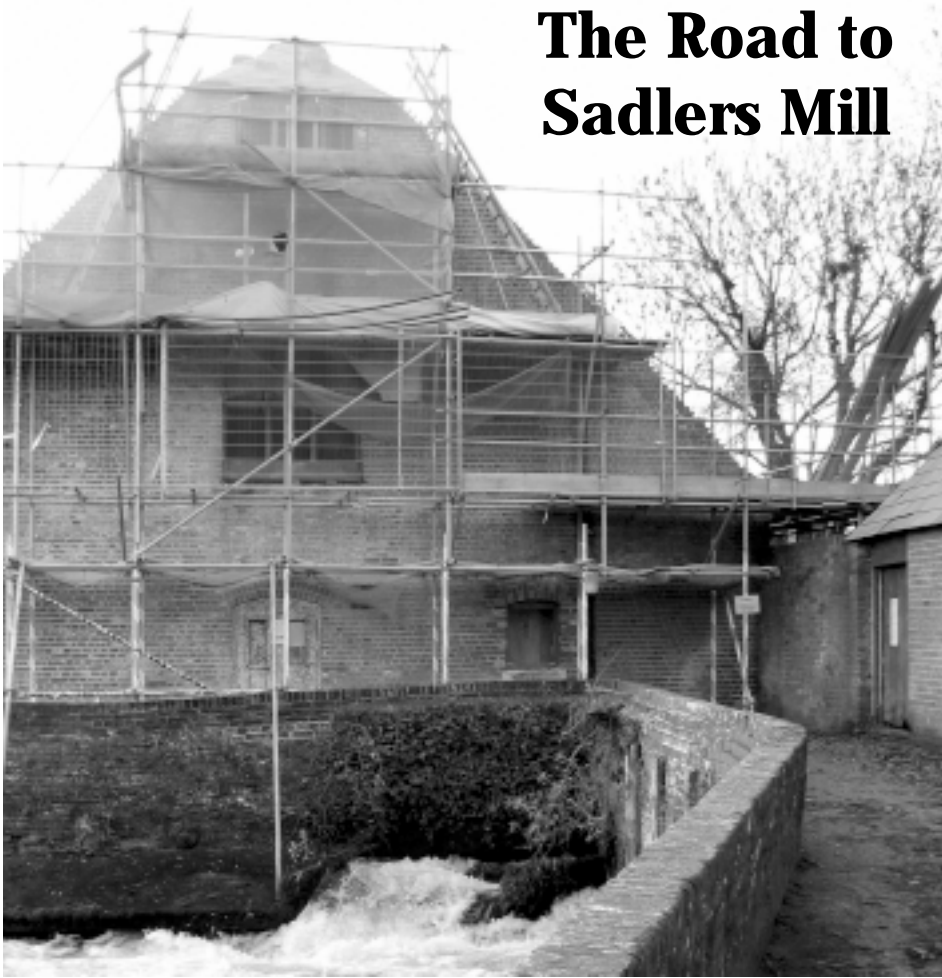
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The Road to Sadlers Mill



The Romsey and District Society Buildings Preservation Trust held its Annual General Meeting on 17th November 2004. After the Society business was completed Mr. Anthony de Sigley presented his talk 'The Road to Sadlers Mill'. Mr. de Sigley is now the owner of Sadlers Mill and is at present, restoring the buildings and converting the mill into residential accommodation. His talk was a report on his progress and on some of the difficulties encountered along the way.

His first step along the road took him to Brook House Farm at Brook which he transformed from a rather unexceptional farmhouse to a home of great character and charm. From here the next step was to Rooksbury Mill near Andover where the millhouse, barns and the mill itself are being

restored and converted into dwellings. Unexpected problems were encountered in both cases and it has to be assumed that his success in overcoming these difficulties gave him the confidence to embark on the challenge of Sadlers Mill.

Anthony had clearly recognised at the outset that the people of Romsey have a special affection for the mill, the river, the footpath and the surrounding area and it is Romsey's very good fortune that he has made every effort to respect this. It soon became apparent that this project involved much more than the renovation of a building. The river is a Site of Special Scientific Interest, the mill is listed, it is an important heritage site and more. The number and diversity of Agencies to be consulted is, seemingly, endless: The Environment Agency, English Nature,

Hampshire County Council, The Planning Departments, the Highways and Footpaths Agencies and, of course, the Romsey and District Society! These are just a few from a much longer list.

Sadlers Mill is an attractive building and very few changes are to be made to the external appearance. Allowing sufficient light to enter is one problem and a careful study of old photographs and drawings has indicated that several windows could be reinstated. Reclaimed materials and techniques are being employed and the original fabric is being retained wherever possible. Some timbers have been repaired by splicing in new wood but others had to be renewed. Worrying problems came to light in the millhouse and the foundations had to be strengthened by driving 45 piles to a depth of 4 metres. This building is now stable.


When finished, the millhouse, together with the little cottage behind, will form one large house and the mill will be converted into two dwellings. In keeping with the principle of retaining the original structure the grain bins (where the grain was stored ready for grinding) have been kept. Each will be a bedroom and it will be plainly apparent that this was once a corn mill.

This is a watermill and the river flows through it and round it. Signs of previous neglect can be seen just upstream. The river is badly silted with the result that no water flows through the three arches towards the western end of the mill. One of these arches was the race for one of the two waterwheels. By clearing the accumulation of silt these channels will be opened up, giving a more balanced flow of water and an improved arrangement for its control.

Associated with the mill is the Causeway, itself in need of repair. A delicate solution is required to satisfy diverse interests; the banks need to be strong enough to support the roadway yet soft enough to allow water voles to build their homes.

Anthony presented a list of the supplies already brought to the site. It includes prodigious quantities of bricks, lime, timber etc, tea and beer. A similar list, made in 1747 when the mill was being built, also included "beer for workmen" and 24,000 bricks at £18. This project will probably cost a little more but, by securing the building for the future, Anthony de Sigley will have ensured that a priceless treasure is retained in Romsey.

Jeff Hawksley




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Before even considering the group of houses now known as Coachmaker's Mews (27 - 33 Latimer Street), if only to make sense of where they are, one has to look at the broader picture of Latimer Street itself. It is all too easy to forget how neglected parts of this inner street had become.



Coachmaker's Mews

Latimer Street was not a happy place to walk along. The narrow pavements, the decayed and rundown buildings, the awkward parking constantly at odds with a stream of two-way traffic, had all but undermined what was good and dignified in this important thoroughfare. Latimer Street was almost aggressively unfriendly to pedestrians. For mothers with prams or for anyone who had difficulty in moving about, it must have been particularly painful. The sheer weight of the traffic was more than the street could bear.

By a combination of coincidence and fine management, several things occurred to change this degraded townscape. The new Waitrose, the future demolition of the existing British Legion building and the new retail premises which are to occupy the Legion's site, were all planned together. The restitution of 27-33 Latimer Street was scheduled within this pattern of major development. To their great credit, the local authorities had seized the opportunity to include Latimer Street within their own enhancement proposals for the inner town. By doing so they have been able to impose some unity on the street and, in the process, perhaps to restore something of its original charm.

It is all of forty years since Lord Esher surprised Kent County Council with the news that their proposed demolition of Abbey Street in Faversham would lay waste one of the finest late mediaeval streets in northern Europe. His vigorous intervention not only saved Abbey Street but had one consequence that was unforeseen at the time. In the process of restoring the splendid half-timbered buildings, the county architects decided to narrow the road to something closer to its original proportions. It has been claimed that this street in Faversham was the first in an English town for

decades actually to narrow the space allowed to traffic. On a much smaller scale, Latimer Street has now followed suit. It is part of the process once described by a French politician as 'giving back the towns to the people who live in them.'

In limiting the traffic avenue to a single line, not only has Latimer Street become less traffic-ridden, but its proportions are more pleasing to the eye. The broader pavements give delight as well as relief. At last a fairer balance has been struck between the motorist and the pedestrian, though in the long run it is possible that the motorist will also gain from a less interrupted traffic flow.

It remains to be seen how the group of retail shops leading to Waitrose (to be built on the old British Legion site) will turn out and how successfully the former Thimbles will be refurbished. Fingers are tightly crossed on this one.

Within the context of this ambitious activity, Sherlockboswell, of No. 11, Oxford Street, Southampton, took on the development of what is now known as Coachmaker's Mews. Of course, the building restrictions were as stringent as one would expect for the inner conservation area of the town. The footprint line had to be retained and, broadly speaking, the varied skyline. Most notably, there was a requirement that the fabric of Cottages 1 & 2 be recycled and that they stay close to their original design. So there was no question of breaking out into a contemporary style for the group as a whole. Because the new Waitrose rises behind this development, an inward-looking courtyard became the central concept of the scheme, though some of the dwellings have dual aspect. The new buildings were to be in brick, with elements of reconstituted Portland stone finish. As well as their different rooflines, the three frontages onto

Latimer Street have their own fenestration lines and window designs. Given this range, they form a pleasing group. Perhaps one would have preferred a unity in slate roofing - the imported French tiles lack the rich colour and texture of their older neighbours - yet the group fits so happily into Latimer Street that there is no sense of intrusion. Indeed, these buildings might have been there forever.

The entry into the mews has particular charm. Great care has been taken to match the original brickwork. The overhang room which forms the arch above the driveway is a dominant feature which effortlessly comes off. Once again, one sees how a simple concept, carefully executed, can create an ambience which pervades a whole set of buildings. This entry cuts into the fourth wall of a three-side courtyard. The architect had to accommodate a vehicle for each of the seven properties which make up the mews, which limited any scope for ornamentation within the courtyard itself. Ideally a tree, or a piece of sculpture, or even a fountain might have taken centre stage. However, there are vestigial borders to the houses as well as a splendid raised planter in brick to the right of the driveway, which softens the visual impact of the courtyard on entry. Whether some owners would have favoured a small garden space at the rear to the conservatories which they have been given we cannot know: this decision was taken out of the architect's hands and imposed by the builder.

The town now has seven small properties, all of them happily occupied, plumb in the town centre, where there were none. The building is to the highest standard and fits in with its neighbours opposite and to the side. The Lortemore carpark takes on something of the feel of a park, with its trees and view of the Abbey fetching onto King John's Garden. Coachmaker's Mews is an object lesson in how truly enhancing, in the hands of a good architect, the sensitive treatment of a brownsite niche can be. Would that it were always so.

Paul Gardner

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A Healthcheck for Romsey

The inaugural meeting on the proposed health check for Romsey took place in the Town Hall on October 27th. Some 50 people, drawn from a wide range of local organisations, turned up. They included three committee members of the Society.

The pedigree of the Healthcheck project is impressive. Under the aegis of the Hampshire County Council Market Towns Project, a partnership has been created with the Countryside Agency, the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA), and the district, town and parish councils within the county. Funding, which comes from SEEDA, amounts to £1.2 million pounds. The extensive network and the financial backing behind the project are signs of how seriously Hampshire takes the market towns within its care. The aim is to build a foundation for the regeneration of the market town, a target established by the CPRE in its recent report Traditional Functions of Rural Towns under Threat and by the Rural White Paper 2000.

The Healthcheck is essentially a community-based, fact-finding report. Through a careful process of workshops, consultation and research, a picture is gradually built up of the strengths, weaknesses, possible opportunities and threats which attach to a particular market town. When all the findings have been analysed, they can be embodied in an action plan which has at its heart a vision of the community. So far twelve Hampshire towns have been designated for this

process: Alton, Alresford, Fleet, Fordingbridge, Hythe, Kingsclere, Liss, New Milton, Petersfield, Romsey, Whitchurch and Whitehill & Borden. Among several others, Bishops Waltham, Emsworth, Lee-on-Solent, Lymington and Ringwood have expressed interest in joining the exercise.

The reasons for a health check are clear enough. There is a need to show, in a form that can draw on established facts, exactly what a town has and what it lacks, what its opportunities are and what dangers threaten it. Through a healthcheck a community has an added sense of direction, which can strengthen its power when the time comes to negotiate and influence local plans. Hard data add weight to bids for funds; they concentrate resources and build teams. The aim is to create four specialist interest groups which will cover the local economy, the local environment, social and community issues and the problems of transport and access.

The White Paper summed up the impact of decision-making on the delicate fabric of a market town:

'Every day countless decisions are made that have the potential to make a piece of a town a little more attractive, welcoming and pleasant, or a little more unpleasant or unsafe, to erode or add to the character.'

In the open session the Society was given the chance to address the meeting. It was suggested that Phoebe Merrick's Look at Romsey project could well be one of the cornerstones of the Romsey healthcheck, though extra funding would be needed to produce a satisfactory final document. Councillor Julian Jones supported this proposal. We also argued that wider familiarity with the Cittaslow concept would be helpful. Finally it was pointed out that Society-sourced projects, such as the Shopfronts and Signage and Carparking audits led by Geoff Morris, and the environmental work of Kate Clark and her subcommittee relate directly to the concerns of a healthcheck.

We would expect the Executive Committee to be closely involved in the process of the healthcheck, giving the Society a proactive rather than reactive role. Such activity could be attractive to new members, as well as engaging the energy and enthusiasm of us all.

John Davies

Up Before the Beak

Did you know that there are approximately five million notified offences every year? Of course many of them, such as parking and exceeding the speed limit, are dealt with by payment of a fixed penalty fine. But did you know that one million of the criminal cases are heard each year in the magistrates' courts in England and Wales? And that only five percent of these are subsequently dealt with in our Crown Courts? And that juries decide only one percent of all criminal cases?


On December 2nd we heard a most interesting talk by Colin Bell who has been a lay magistrate since 1979 and is currently the Vice-Chairman for the New Forest Bench, which sits at Lyndhurst. He began by briefly reminding us of the history of our magistracy. Our judicial system can be traced back to 1195. In that year Richard 1 commissioned certain knights to preserve the peace in unruly areas. They were responsible to the King for ensuring that the law was upheld; they preserved the 'King's Peace' and were known as Keepers of the Peace. The title Justices of the Peace derives from 1361, in the reign of Edward III. An Act in 1327 had referred to 'good and lawful' men to be appointed in every county to 'guard the peace'. Justices of the Peace still retain the power to bind over unruly persons to be of good behaviour. The bind-over is not a punishment but a preventive measure, intended to ensure that people thought likely to offend will not do so. The next notable change was in 1835 when the Lord Chancellor confirmed the nomination of the Lord Lieutenants, who had their own methods for finding suitable candidates. Then the Liberal



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Government in 1906 introduced an Advisory committee system to ensure that Liberals and Conservatives were equally represented. The first six women were appointed on 1 January 1920. Today these Advisory committees continue to ensure equal representation of gender, ethnicity and political opinion between the ages of 27 and 70.

There are currently 31,000 lay magistrates in England and Wales, all of whom receive regular training in order to achieve consistency in procedures and sentencing across our courts. Colin explained how magistrates "listen" to cases in order to identify the aggravating and mitigating conditions. For instance, premeditation is treated as an aggravating situation, an admission of guilt is treated as mitigation. After hearing the case the three members of the bench retire to decide together first, whether the defendant is guilty or not, then to take account of the aggravating and mitigating conditions, and finally to decide on the sentence. Generally today's courts use custodial sentences as a last resort. They have a range of options such as community service, fines, curfews, training centres and health assessments. They may choose one or more of these to tailor their sentence to the particular circumstances of the defendant. As Colin also pointed out, it would not be equitable to fine a millionaire and someone on benefit payments the same amount for an identical offence.

Finally, Colin gave us a typical Case Study, involving a shoplifting Mum and her daughter. Following a lively discussion I think we reached a more unanimous view than we ever would have done before his talk. I feel sure that we all left reassured that our unique judicial system of lay magistrates is in good hands.

Harry Tuffil

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Look at Romsey: the Historic Core

The launch of the last area, the historic core of the town, in the *Look at Romsey* project, attracted a capacity crowd in the Court Room of the Town Hall on Thursday 14 October. It was the best attended of all the areas said Phoebe Merrick, the convenor of the project, in her introduction.

Phoebe explained that *Look at Romsey* was being undertaken by the Society and sponsored by Test Valley Borough and other local Councils. Its purpose was to establish the valued architectural and other visual characteristics of each area that residents wanted retained. The object was to manage change, not prevent it. The outcome would be a Design Statement for each of ten areas, useful as Supplementary Planning Guidance. It was hoped that such statements would give developers guidelines as to what was acceptable in character and design.

The outline of streets in the town centre had been established by 1840 although the area contains many buildings erected since then. Architect Neill Beasley gave a photographic meander around familiar and generally much-loved buildings, alerting us to architectural features so easily missed on business and shopping forays. He reminded us that the Society was instrumental in saving Romsey from the bulldozers in the 1970's; Cherville Street was especially valued for that reason.

The eleventh-century Abbey with its dominating stone structure was the bedrock of the town. Historic King John's House had been delightfully restored and was cared for by a Trust; adjoining was the sixteenth-century Tudor cottage. Neill drew our attention to the various forms, colour and styles, as well as the roofline of buildings in the Market Place. Worthy of mention were the curve on the corner of Lloyds TSB, echoing the curve on National Westminster Bank with its mathematical tile cladding, the United Reformed Church arch and the eighteenth-century White Horse Inn façade hiding its timber frame. The 1860 Corn Market now houses Barclays

Bank; neighbouring buildings revealed the regency façade of the old Dolphin Hotel, as well as the older Tudor Rose public house. Some of the more recent façades came in for criticism especially those of the multi-national chains; they were on an uncomfortable scale as were Duke's Mill development and Bradbeer's frontage to Bell Street. By contrast, Bradbeer's new, gabled glass façade with the newly-enclosed Holbrook stream running alongside makes a very attractive addition to our townscape.

New developments meriting Neill's approval were Portersbridge Street reflecting its historic context, Chavy Water described as quiet with sensitivity of scale and proportion and Newton Lane, which knits together like Romsey itself. The architectural feature of jettied found in the Tudor Manor House (now Prezzo) was echoed in the Church Road houses completed in 1980.

Neill concluded by stressing the need to appreciate and guard the entire architectural charm of our historic market town.

Phoebe explained that Phase 1 would be a familiarisation exercise including four walks starting in November and finishing on 2 January 2005.

The meeting ended with questions from the floor. David Bibby, Senior Planning Officer, who is overseeing the project for the Borough Council assured residents that Design Statements were used where relevant and could be accepted for supplementary planning guidance.

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Save our Streets

English Heritage has launched its campaign to free the streets of England from the clutter of signs and street furniture which presently so disfigure them. They have as their partner the National Federation of Women's Institutes and as their spearhead Bill Bryson, the distinguished American author who is English Heritage Commissioner for 2004.

In his foreword to the booklet *Save our Streets*, Bill Bryson sums up the campaign's aims :

'Nothing says more, nor more immediately, of how a nation feels about itself, than the way it dresses its streets. England's streets are very important to how it is perceived by the world. For people like me, parachuted from abroad, the way a nation presents its streets is the first thing they notice.

This is a country thoughtful enough to remind people to look left and right before stepping off the kerb, and stylish enough to produce iconic pieces of street furniture such as the red telephone and letter boxes. It is incumbent upon England to show world leadership in civilised streets.

This booklet (*Save Our Streets*) is about English Heritage's campaign to restore

dignity and character to our historic streets, largely by removing the blight of unnecessary signs, poles, bollards, barriers, hotchpotch paving schemes and obtrusive road markings under which they currently suffer. It is hard to imagine something that would make more immediate improvement to our surroundings that could be so quickly and cheaply achieved.'

Barbara Gill, Chairman of the National Federation of Women's Institutes, has pledged the support of her members to serve the campaign, 'honoured by the invitation from English Heritage to be a partner in this important and exciting project.'

Our planning departments bring their expertise and do their best to improve the fabric and appearance of the townscape. Transport departments, acting independently, produce the traffic signs deemed necessary for road safety. The result, as Brian Palmer points out in his Chairman's Column, can be seen emblematically in the recent careful and thoroughgoing modifications to Latimer Street. Lovely work has been achieved here, but just try standing with your back to the former Sportsman's shop window and seeing what meets the eye. As well as a forest of vertical signs, each within a pace or two of each other, a double strip of yellow paint stretches out to infinity on either side of the road. This does not stop with the tarmac, but continues on to disfigure the beautifully laid stone setts.

There must be better ways of doing this and English Heritage explains some of them.

Paul Gardner



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Clutter in Romsey's

Conservation Area

For some time Geoff Morris has been photographing parts of the Romsey streetscape where the signs and furniture appear to him ugly or redundant. To these photographs he has appended annotations, commenting incisively on what his camera shows and suggesting what improvements could be made. This work was inspired by exactly the same beliefs and principles as those of the English Heritage campaign.

As we go to press, Geoff Morris has brought together and privately printed his key photographs and text in a booklet entitled *Clutter in Romsey's Conservation Area*. This has already been noticed in *The Romsey Advertiser* and aroused considerable interest at a recent meeting of the Romsey Forum. The few copies which Geoff had over have been put on sale at Latimer News, priced at £1.75. If demand exists, he may go into a reprint.

Everyone who cares about Romsey should own a copy and take its content to heart. You will find here a text to dazzle and amuse, to rouse to anger and delight .

Romsey la Ronde

Romsey la Ronde is an occasion when some families open their gardens for the pleasure of others. It is Romsey and District Society's contribution to the Romsey Arts Festival, which takes place every three years. If you would like a chance to meet fellow gardeners and share the results of your labours, would you like to open your garden, large or small, on Sunday 17th of July 2005? If so, please contact Jo Kyte on 01794/522865.

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Two Autumn Walks

Martin Gale and Jeff Watkin report on two recent walks.

Despite a doom and gloom forecast the previous evening, nineteen keen walkers turned out on the morning of Saturday, 9 October for a reasonable five-mile yomp around the Farley Mount Area.

After the obligatory group photo we set off eastwards along the path of the Clarendon Way. Crab Wood, which was a carpet of bluebells back in May, was now showing all the gorgeous colours of autumn.

The walk followed mainly good paths and the occasional quiet lane northwards to the quaint hamlet of Dean and on to Sparsholt where the Plough Inn, well known for its real ale and food, made us welcome. A good sandwich later (try the roast sirloin) and well rested, we continued on through the north end of the village westwards. A good path, gradually climbing all the way up through the woods to the car

park, took us across an enormous field back towards the Mount.

Approximately 5 miles and 4 hours later we had reached our starting point, and a good time was had by all.

Our second walk was also successful and well supported.

On the morning of Sunday, 28 November, led by Jeff Watkin, 22 members and two dogs met at the Kings Somborne Village Hall car park under a mantle of blue sky. Jeff Watkin led our 'Ashley Amble', of some 4.25 miles, past the mounds of John of Gaunt's Palace. After a short stretch on the village pavements, we were soon in the countryside, with a rather energetic climb giving us the reward of sweeping views over the Test Valley. After a stretch along some quiet lanes we arrived at the picturesque hamlet of Ashley, with its impressive old houses and village well-house.

Our first port of call in Ashley was the early Norman redundant church, where Dr. Peter Horsey gave us a most interesting tour. We then went down to the Old Manor, where Dr. Peter and Rosemary had kindly invited us in for a welcome break of coffee and biscuits.

Both the guided tour of the church and the coffee break were very much appreciated.

With a darkening sky threatening, we returned to Kings Somborne, arriving at the cars just as drizzle was starting, everyone with an appetite for Sunday lunch.



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Future Walks

A mid-week walk of some 6 miles, with a stop for a pub lunch, on

Wednesday, 9 February. Please phone Diane Hargreaves on 512315 nearer the date of the walk, to register your interest and to obtain further details.

Sunday 24 April. Walk - Lyndhurst Park Enclosure - 5 miles (with short drink stop in Lyndhurst). Meet 10.00am. Leaders: Viv and Carolyn Nixon 501896.

In the Town Hall on September 28th, Nick Zorab (below) opened the Autumn Programme. His subtle exposition of the effect of demographic change on the housing market was much appreciated by his large audience.



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Action For Market Towns

In our last issue, Deborah Wilson gave the background to the September conference Action for Market Towns, hosted at Romsey. John Davies reports.

On the evening of September 23rd some 160 delegates from England and Wales and from as far afield as Peterhead in Scotland descended on Romsey. The conference was launched by the Chairman's keynote address and an official welcome from the Town Mayor, followed by an excellent buffet supper donated by Waitrose. On the Friday there was a further welcome from the Test Valley Mayor and the Romsey MP, Sandra Gidley.

The AMT Chairman, David Fletcher, drew out the lessons learnt from the Market Towns Initiative and to wind up the introductory session the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) reported on how the region was responding to these findings.

The titles of the various workshops indicate the scope of the response. The morning programme offered discussion on Affordable Housing, Transport Problems, Marketing Food and Drink (using Hampshire Farmer's Market as an example), Organising Events and Celebrations, and Maintaining Services (which focussed on the town as the service centre to its hinterland). The afternoon sessions covered Youth (which stressed the need to search imaginatively for new ways to engage young people in market towns), Support through Strategic

Relationships (which offered case studies of good practice, where towns had found support from regional development agencies), and How to make the Planning System work for You, where the Society's Look at Romsey, led by Phoebe Merrick, is a good example.

The Cittaslow approach from Italy was held up as a useful European model. The concept began when a small town in northern Italy felt threatened by the arrival of a Macdonald's in 1999. From this beginning, a whole programme of policies and strategies developed. The starting point was to market good local food (slow) as a counterblast to the new (fast) food. By applying clear principles to towns with extremely varied and locally distinct heritages, townscape and environment, it became possible to increase competitiveness and attract investment through the promotion of the local quality of life. It has to be said that Cittaslow is not about creating museum towns where time stands still: its overriding message is to offer smaller towns a means of regeneration by concentrating on quality and local distinctiveness.

The Society was involved at various levels throughout the final day, providing marshalls to shepherd delegates around the town and a presentation and site visit, conducted by Phoebe Merrick, on her Look at Romsey design statement. Christina Cole, the Town Centre Manager, Greg Davies of Bradbeer's and Dominic Jones of Waitrose collaborated in a presentation on retail development in Romsey. There were conducted tours of the abbey and King John's House under the aegis of LTVAS. A display of the Society's work was well received.

Among the final workshops was Lessons from the Countryside Agency's Healthcheck, which was based on the Hampshire experience. This important development is discussed in the accompanying article is on page 10.

Comment Sheets assessing the programme on a five-point scale gave an overall average of 3.5. Among the most successful were Look at Romsey with an average of 4.2 and the Abbey and King John's House tours with an average of 4.5

John Davies

New Members

We welcome the following new members:

Mrs. Jennifer Austin	Romsey
Cllr. Julian L. Bank	Romsey
Mrs. Geraldine Barron	Romsey
Mr. & Mrs. Burbidge	Romsey
Cllr. Jill Gethin	Romsey
Mr. Godfrey Heaven	Romsey
Mrs. Thelma Hyde	Ampfield
Mr. Andrew Lalonde	Braishfield
Dr. & Mrs Matthews	Romsey
Mr. & Mrs. Colin Moretti	Romsey
Ms. Zoe Paskins	Romsey
Mr. Ralph Ray	Hursley
Cllr. Rod Simpson	Romsey
Mrs Janet Tuck	Romsey
Mrs. Jennifer Wilsdon	Romsey

Romsey and the Role of Religious Women in the Early Medieval Church

Saturday 19th March 2005
King John's Hunting Lodge,
Romsey

A day conference organised by the Centre for Antiquity and the Middle Ages, Southampton University on new research into the early medieval history of the nunnery at Romsey and its wider historical context. Speakers include Dr Julia Crick (Exeter), Frank Green (Romsey), Leonie Hicks (Southampton) and Prof. Barbara Yorke (King Alfred's, Winchester).

For information and registration contact: Dr Helen Gittos, 8 Arthur Street, Oxford, OX2 0AS; gittos@soton.ac.uk; 01865 791 590.

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Next News Sheet

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R&DS 30th Annual General Meeting

Tuesday 15 February 2005
7.30 for 8pm Linden Road Hall

Agenda

- 1 Apologies for absence
- 2 Minutes of the last AGM
- 3 Matters arising
- 4 Treasurer's report
- 5 Membership report
- 6 Chairman's report
- 7 Election of officers*
- 8 Election of Executive Committee*
- 9 Election of Independent Examiners
(Auditors)
- 10 Reports of the year's activities
- 11 Any other business

* Please send nominations of officers and
committee members by letter or e-mail, with
the name of the seconder and the consent of
the nominee, to reach the Secretary by 24
January 2005.

R&DS Secretary,
Birch Wood House, Cadnam,
Southampton, SO40 2NR
or philipwarneruk@aol.com

Annual Lecture

Revd Canon Neil Crawford-Jones

Vicar of Romsey

"Change and decay in all around I see?"

Thursday 14 April 2005
7.30 (wine) for 8pm Romsey Town Hall
Admission by (free) ticket only.

Last year's lecture was fully booked. We
recommend that you reserve your seats **NOW**.
Please send an SAE with a note of how many
tickets and your 'phone number to:
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Romsey, SO51 8BU

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Annual Dinner

Wednesday 18 May 2005

7pm (sherry) for 7.30pm

White Horse Hotel, Romsey

£19.75 inc. sherry, coffee & service

Our usual informal (no speeches!),
friendly meal, at which we hope to meet
many newer members.

There is no need to make up a table, but
you can if you first phone the Secretary to
talk about numbers.

Early booking recommended as we
usually have a waiting list. Full refund if
you have to cancel before 16 May.

SAE with a note saying how many tickets
and your phone number to:

R&DS Secretary,
Birch Wood House, Cadnam,
Southampton, SO40 2NR
Tel: 023 8081 3400
philipwarneruk@aol.com

DO NOT PAY YET

We will write in April asking for your
menu choice and payment. If you are on a
waiting list we tell you at once.

Please book quickly as numbers are limited

QUIZ NIGHT

Saturday February 5th,
7.30pm, Linden Road Hall

Tickets £7 to include
Ploughman's Supper
Bring own drinks

**Come as a team of 6
or join a team on the night.**

Please send **SAE** to: Denise Amery,
5 The Harrage, Romsey, SO51 8AE with
your cheque or cash, a note saying how
many tickets and your telephone number.

WELLOW GOLF CLUB

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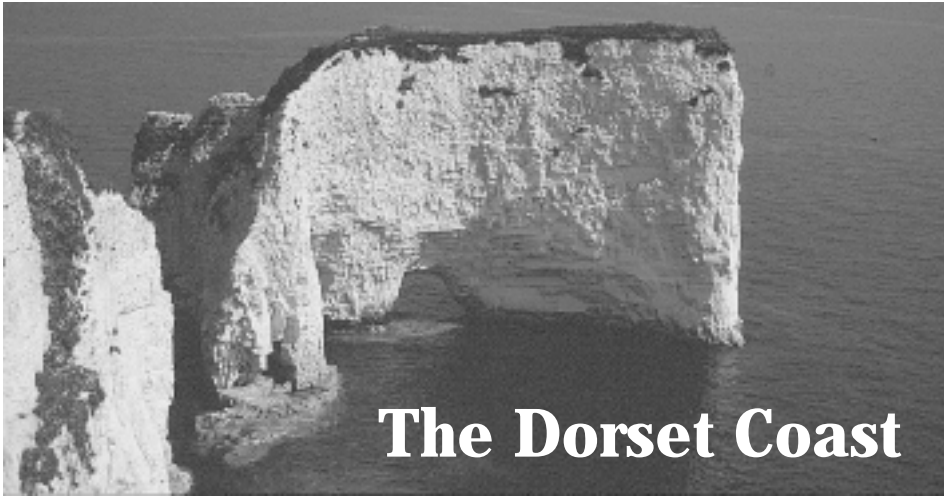
WHY NOT VISIT US FOR Lunches, Teas or Dinners

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The Dorset Coast

King John's House was filled to capacity to welcome David Young back to Romsey to talk about the flora and fauna of his new surroundings in Dorset. The area was declared the first World Heritage Site in 2002 and is one of the wonders of the natural world. The geology represents 185 million years of earth history in 95 miles of coastal land. David started at the eastern end with Portland, well known for the quality and beauty of its building stone. This was followed by Chesil Bank, one of the finest barrier beaches in the world caused by long shore drift from which pebbles should not be taken as it will upset the stability of this area. There is great diversity of geological strata from the oldest rocks forming the cliffs in the west to the dark clay and Portland limestone found in the east. The land slip between Black Ven and Lyme Regis illustrates the differing layers as they were formed. David had an impressive selection of slides including fossils such as ammonites from the Jurassic period still found at Lyme Regis. Sadly, the coast is constantly changing and under threat. There is a move to protect it from rainfall by drilling holes and inserting pipes. Also granite rocks are imported from St. Malo to protect the harbours.

Dorset has suffered from depopulation and there are moves to start a regeneration scheme. The county is a lovely backwater with many lanes and no motorways, rather like England 100 years ago and reminiscent of Hardy's time. However, shops, pubs and post offices have been closing, showing signs of depression. Now second home-owners are moving in and the County is boosting tourism. It is strange that such a beautiful area has been so neglected, with cars making a beeline for the west country. It is sad that tourism is so essential to benefit Dorset as change will be inevitable but maybe only nature lovers, walkers and cyclists will be found this far off the beaten track.

Fortunately Bridport remains a thriving market town. It still has the old Saxon layout and boasts the only thatched brewery in England. Their main trade was making ropes and nets; they had a ropewalk for the long cables needed for sailing ships. They still supply Wimbledon with nets and pockets for billiard tables. The market is worth a visit and also the band festival.

David ended his talk with some beautiful slides of butterflies and caterpillars, 49 of the 69 species found in the UK being found in the area, including the rare humming bird hawk moth. Slides of Dragonflies and spiders were also shown and finally some wonderful coastal plants and flowers such as orchids, wild iris in wetlands and many maritime species.

If you were unlucky enough to miss this talk, you will still have the opportunity to go on a guided visit there next year, which David will help with, and of course the annual walk on Sunday May 15 is to be at Lulworth..

Gill Roberts



Chris King
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