

THE REIGATE SOCIETY
1991-1998

MARY GOSS

Being the fourth Chapter of the History of the Society

Published by: THE REIGATE SOCIETY

FOREWORD

In 1977, John Stammers, one of the founder members of the Society wrote 'The Reigate Society, a Short History, 1952-1977'. Its sub-title was '25 YEARS OF ENDEAVOUR'. John Nauen added to this in 1984, with 'The Next Seven Years 1977-84', and in 1991, Mary Goss continued with 'The Reigate Society 1985-91'.

Mary Goss held the posts of Chairman and of Honorary Secretary and then continued her close involvement with the day-to-day workings of the Society until she retired from our Council in 1996. She was elected as a Vice-President 'for services to the Society' and still serves as one of our Trustees. I am very pleased that she also agreed to undertake the writing of this, the fourth chapter of our written history.

Denis Fishleigh
Chairman, 1995-8.

The year 1991 ended with the opening of the Belfry Shopping Centre in Redhill. This was followed by the pedestrianisation of the High Street and the establishment of a twice-weekly market. The Reigate Society had played a full part in discussions with the developers and their architects. Meanwhile the ambitious scheme for the re-development of Reigate Town Centre had run into financial difficulties and the developers were forced to pull out. The Supermarket Chain, Safeway, bought the site and submitted an entirely new scheme. This was discussed with the Reigate Society resulting in many modifications. As well as the single-storey supermarket there are several smaller shop units and the historic Cage has been re-furbished for use as a wine bar. The Post Office in Bell Street was demolished and re-located in the Store. All this is located in a spacious landscaped car park and there is a path through from the High Street to the Priory Grounds. Most people have welcomed the new facilities but the town has not been re-vitalised as was hoped. Many small shops have not been able to compete with Safeway and there are frequent changes of tenancy. The volume of traffic entering and leaving the car park has led to traffic problems in Bell Street.

The early nineties were a time of national recession. One result was a sharp decline in the number of planning applications and the postponement of many schemes which already had planning permission. One such was the re-development of Reigate Station, the disgraceful state of which has been an embarrassment for many years. However work of demolition began in September 1997, and building is due to start in March 1998.

Another casualty of the recession has been the Hepworth Minerals and Chemicals scheme for Holmethorpe. The Reigate Society had supported the Merstham Residents' Association in their opposition to the scheme which was initially disallowed by the Secretary of State on Green Belt grounds. Hepworths had promised to build a new road under the railway to relieve congestion in the Holmethorpe area so the Borough Local Plan for 1991 included changes in the Green Belt boundary. There followed a public enquiry at which we were represented in January 1992. The way was opened for further planning applications from Hepworths but at the time of writing, six years later, nothing has happened.

Despite the recession several large scale schemes called for the Society's attention. The first, in 1993, was a planning application by a body called the European Development Corporation, for a 'Re-Cycling and Bio-Thermal Waste to Energy' Plant on the disused Fullers Earth site east of Redhill. Usually known as 'the Incinerator', the plan provoked an outcry which led to the formation of the East Redhill Residents' Association. The Reigate Society supported them and representatives attended an exhibition on the scheme. In the event, the scheme was withdrawn and did not go to public enquiry. It was in the wrong place at the wrong time. Its sheer size, fear of pollution and the certain increase in road traffic spelled the end of the scheme.

The problems of Gatwick Airport have always been with us. We have long supported the Gatwick Area Conservation Campaign (GACC) in resisting plans which would further harm the environment. There is still only one runway though there has been a great increase in Terminal Facilities. A second runway, to the north, would destroy the

historic Wealden Village of Charlwood which would be unthinkable. The latest suggestion is for a smaller runway to the south of the present one.

Meanwhile our own Redhill Aerodrome in 1993 was the subject of a massive planning application consisting of three large volumes of reports with plans and diagrams. The proposal was for a runway 1000 metres long, a terminal for 2.5 million passengers per annum, a 220 bedroom conference hotel and a link road to the M23. All this in the Green Belt ! The Reigate Society supported the 'Consortium Against the Redhill Aerodrome Plans' in strong opposition. As a result the application was "called in" by the Secretary of State who later turned it down. Much money was spent in the preparation of these plans and there is fear that the application will be re-submitted "when the time is ripe", although all government statements say 'No !' .

Like Gatwick Airport, the M25 problems will always be with us. Hopes that its opening would relieve traffic congestion in our towns were soon dashed. Congestion on the motorway particularly to the west of Reigate led to plans to widen it and make provision for extra "feeder roads". The Reigate Society supported the Borough and County Councils in objecting to the scheme on environmental grounds. The Annual Report for 1993 included a Policy Statement on the M25. A final decision for the Reigate section was for widening to four lanes within the existing boundaries. A complication was that large sections of the carriageway had to be relaid after the sub-strata were found to be waterlogged. For over 2 years we had to suffer 19 miles of road works at the top of Reigate Hill. Frequent delays and accidents meant that traffic had to descend to our already over-loaded roads. At the time of writing, the situation is better than it has been for a long time. Elsewhere, the Reigate Society had long pressed for an improvement to the M23/A23 junction at Hooley, which was finally agreed, only to be held up due to financial cut-backs. It is still in the County's list of works to be done.

By 1994, the large issues just reported were concluded and the Society was able to turn its attention to more local matters, chief of which was the establishment of the Borough Environmental Forum in January 1995. The idea of the Forum came from Dr. David Goode (now our President) who had experience of the work of such bodies. A Forum would consist of representatives of groups concerned for the Environment, who would meet, together with representatives of the Borough Council, to discuss environmental issues and stimulate action. Accordingly our Secretary summoned a meeting of representatives from the whole Borough in 1991. There was strong support for the idea, so an approach was made to the Borough Council, but response was slow. However in June 1992 came the United Nations Conference on the Environment in Rio de Janeiro, the largest gathering of Heads of Government ever held. Out of the Conference came Agenda 21, a blue print for environmental development in the 21st century signed by 150 countries. Arising from this came the Government's initiative - Local Agenda 21 "A programme to improve the local environment and quality of life through sustainable development." The Borough Council now took up the challenge of Local Agenda 21 (LA21) and accepted the offer of the Reigate Society to help with establishing the Forum. The Borough Council is represented by the Environmental Health Manager and their newly appointed Environmental Co-ordinator, who spoke at our 'Get-Together' in 1996. Eric Sidebotham who represents the Society on

the Forum has reported its progress regularly in Newsletters and Annual Reports. Initially four groups were set up: Transport, Wild Life Action, Waste Management, and Community Awareness. The Forum is a borough-wide organisation, which includes Banstead and Horley. Meetings are held at different venues, but the elongated character of the Borough makes access difficult, despite excellent maps produced by the Environmental Co-ordinator. How much the Forum can achieve in the face of so many intractable problems remains to be seen.

For many years, the Architecture & Planning Committee has taken a special interest in the quality of shop fronts and has carried out surveys from time to time and has urged the Borough Council to produce guide lines. They commented on a draft and suggested improvements, some of which were incorporated. In September 1993, The Reigate Town Centre Initiative was set up "to improve the attractiveness of the town centre to its potential customers and the general public". The Reigate Society is represented together with representatives from the Borough Council, trades organisations and local employers. Some money is available so bids could be made to finance properly detailed and costed projects. Already completed are:- paving and landscape work outside the Old Town Hall; bus shelter in London Road; improved lighting in the Tunnel Road; increasing parking in the High Street and finger posts in the town centre. Landscaping at the junction of Slipshoe Street and West Street is still going on. A Town Centre Manager has been appointed for Redhill, and the Reigate Society is now represented on the Redhill Town Centre Management Committee.

The Architecture and Planning Committee together with the Redhill Committee continue to monitor planning applications, concentrating on those in sensitive areas. The Redhill Committee finally lost the battle to prevent an Insurance Company from building a dominant office block in a residential area, Linkfield Lane. In Reigate the future use of Pine End, which had housed an ILEA boarding school was debated. Micklefield School wished to buy it, but problems of access caused them to abandon their scheme which involved the construction of a round-about on the A25 at the approach to Reigate. The site was finally bought for use as a 60 bed Nursing Home even though access via a narrow lane was unsatisfactory and only 19 parking spaces were available. Permission was given, including an extension.

So far most of the problems with which the Reigate Society has been involved have been urban but, thanks to Green Belt policies, there are still large rural areas comprising farmland and common lands. As a result of the Government policy of "set aside", uses have been sought for land which has gone out of cultivation. The easiest answer has been Golf Courses and all over Surrey planning applications for these have been received. Only one in the Reigate area has gone ahead with the opening of Reigate Hill Golf Course along Gatton Bottom. The Reigate Society opposed it as it is in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Another application in the Sidlow area is being re-activated. On the Common lands, the idea of Management Plans has been slowly accepted. That for Reigate Heath is now in place, under the chairmanship of a borough councillor, the Reigate Society being represented by its Vice-Chairman (Miss Claudia Payne). The plan for Earlswood Common is ready and a management plan for Priory Park is proposed. The Natural Amenities Committee of the Reigate Society has been in touch with these developments and has worked closely with the local Conservation Volunteers.

While there has been some reduction in planning applications, the Society's Committees are increasingly called upon to comment on planning documents which flow from both the Borough and Surrey County Councils. Chief of these is the Surrey Structure Plan, the major planning framework, which is constantly revised and up-dated. Fitting in with this is the Borough Local Plan. The Reigate Society is in broad agreement with these plans for, apart from the disagreement over the Green Belt in Holmethorpe, both the local authorities are fully conscious of environmental issues. The confrontations which were characteristic of the early days of the Reigate Society are almost a thing of the past.

The Reigate Society has always taken an interest in Conservation areas but it was felt that we should not only preserve these but enhance them. A start was made with the Flanchford Road/Colley Lane area. A questionnaire was issued to all residents and meetings were held (the Society experienced a marked increase in membership as a result). The results were analysed and a report was sent to the Borough Council's Planning Committee who expressed their appreciation. Some improvements have taken place but there has been a delay in the preparation of "A design guide for property alterations in Conservation Areas". This has meant postponement of the next project, which is to be the St. Johns' Conservation Area.

"Car based pollution and traffic congestion are probably among the most important problems currently facing the Borough". Now that the M25 roadworks have been completed there has been less disruption from that source. However, traffic generated locally has steadily increased leading to pressure from local residents, supported by the Reigate Society, for traffic calming measures. A start was made in Earlswood in 1993-94, followed by the Wray Park area in 1997. Not everybody is happy with the humps and tables and some modifications have had to be made. Even so, there are nine humps in Raglan Road, between Reigate Hill and Wray Common.

Noise and congestion in Reigate High Street have resulted in constant appeals to the Surrey County Council to proceed with the Town Centre Relief Road, first proposed in 1972 as a result of suggestions from the Reigate Society. A Redhill/Reigate Movement Study is now top of the list for 1998/99, with any work to be done in 1999/2000. Constant exhortations, nationally and locally, to leave the car at home, use public transport, cycle or even walk, all fall on deaf ears. The Transport Committee of the Reigate Society works tirelessly to monitor developments and suggest solutions. They cope with air transport as well as rail and road. The dire situation on the railways can only improve as they settle down after privatisation. One reason for the continual increase in traffic is the housing policy of "infilling". Green Belt policies mean that future housing development should be on vacant land in urban areas. We have reached the point in this area when "infilling" has become "town cramming". While there has been no major housing development, the sum total of all the small developments is considerable. If every new house has only one car, the resulting traffic problems are obvious. Recent examples are the housing developments on the site of the old Redhill Technical College and the re-development of the Gas Works site in Nutley Lane (50 houses). While the demand for houses increases how is the Borough to meet the need? There are plans for massive developments in Horley in the face of strong local opposition.

The founders of the Reigate Society in 1952 were a group of people who had led the fight to save the Priory for the people of Reigate. The Society was long under the impression that the Borough Council had bought the building and had leased it to the County Council for use as a school. When the lease was due to expire in 1995, we discovered that the building was owned jointly by both Councils and that the County wished to buy out the Borough's share. The Annual General Meeting of the Reigate Society in 1995 was dominated by the issue and feelings ran high. In the event, after negotiation, a long term lease was agreed and the County Council has agreed to keep in repair the Verrio murals and the Holbein fireplace. The future of the Priory building having been assured, the Natural Amenities Committee of the Reigate Society turned its attention to the grounds. Extensive tree work had been carried out by contractors who had not always followed ecological principles. The state of the lake had given cause for anxiety as it became infested with blue-green algae. Remedial measures have not been entirely successful. Moreover, in 1997, the lake showed signs of drying up and investigations revealed that some of the inlets were blocked with silt which should have been cleared regularly. All this emphasises the need for a Management Plan for Priory Park.

Our Chairman (Denis Fishleigh), who lives in Redhill, has often raised the problem of the naming of the electoral wards which date from the days of the old Reigate Borough Council. All the wards have Reigate designations followed by points of the compass. Redhill and Merstham are not mentioned. There is need for the re-naming of the wards, giving them more realistic historical and geographical names. The Reigate Society has given its support to these views and representations have been made to the Borough Council who have set up a working party to look into the matter, in anticipation of the Local Government Commission's review of Local Authorities below county level. Among the Commission's powers is the review of names of all areas. The Commission's draft report has accepted the idea of a change of names and we expect the final report later in 1998.

In November 1994 a planning application was received from Pubmaster Ltd, which involved changing the name of the Red Cross Public House to 'Tap & Spile'. This provoked an outcry especially from those who cherish the history of the town. After discussions with the owners, a compromise was reached. We were unable to stop the change of name, but the existing Red Cross symbol has been retained in the sign and a plaque outside gives historical information.

In the past, extractive industries have been important in Redhill and Reigate but all useful deposits are now worked out. However, in neighbouring Buckland, ARC has extensive deposits of silver sand in the Folkestone Beds of the Lower Greensand formation. The Reigate Society has always been ready to help the Buckland Residents' Action Committee in their fight against extensions to the Tapwood Pit. We in Reigate have long suffered from the heavy lorries which thunder through on their way northwards to the Motorway and beyond. The Society gave £500 to help to fight the latest application for extension of the pit, but the cause was lost. While recognising the case put by the residents, the Inspector felt that, as the deposit was of national importance, its extraction should continue.

The pattern of lectures, outings and social events has remained unchanged throughout this period, but declining attendance

has been a cause of anxiety. The lectures, organised by Bob Richards, have ranged from travel talks to serious environmental issues. The facilities of the new Woodhatch Centre have been greatly appreciated but it is essential for us to use other venues, especially the Woolsack room at the Redhill Harlequin. The highlight of the lecture programme was the third Frank Potter Memorial Lecture, given in the Harlequin Theatre in 1992 by John Julius Norwich, the famous author and broadcaster. His topic "Tourism Pollution", while not immediately attractive, highlighted a growing problem. As expected much of the talk concerned Venice, a city with which he has had a long association. No further 'Frank Potter Lectures' are planned as the Reigate Society hopes to be able to use the fund for a more permanent memorial connected with Reigate Priory. This however depends on a number of factors, which are currently under investigation.

The annual outing continues to be popular. Our thanks are due to Ken Ward who took over their organisation after John Nauen retired. The Society has continued its Civic Awards scheme even though the Borough Council has instituted a similar scheme covering the whole Borough. The Society is represented on the committee which makes these awards. Communication with members continues with the Annual Report and three Newsletters each year. A new publicity leaflet is now available.

From time to time the Society has recorded the deaths of prominent members who have been active in its affairs. In 1994 Eric Drew, a long serving member of the Council and the A&P Committee; in March 1996, Ken Scholey another long serving member of the Council and a former PRO and John Nauen, a long standing Treasurer and organiser of many events. Obituaries were published in the Annual Reports.

A decline in membership of the Reigate Society has been accompanied by a decline in active membership. Thanks are due to the small group of people who accepted the burden of running the Society. They need the support of more volunteers to serve on the committees, including the re-formed Merstham committee.

This report is longer than the previous one as awareness of problems of the Environment both national and local has increased. The Reigate Society has given much thought to these and will continue to do so in the years ahead. As we approach the Millennium and our own Jubilee there are three major problems to be addressed:-

Housing: Can the targets for more housing in the South-East be met without breaching the Green Belt boundaries ?

Waste Management: What will happen when the rapidly diminishing landfill sites are full? Can some form of incineration be avoided ?

Traffic: How can this be reduced and managed ?

Financial restraints are making long term planning difficult, particularly as they vary from year to year.

OFFICERS of the REIGATE SOCIETY 1991-98

President:	Sir Peter Masefield	1990-1995
	Prof. David Goode	1995-
Chairman:	Miss M.Goss	1989-1992
	D.J.Turner	1992-1995
	D.A.Fishleigh	1995-1998
Hon.Secretary:	J.N.Angel	1989-
Hon.Treasurer:	J.A.Nauen	1979-1993
	C.Burbidge	1993-
Hon.Registrar:	Mrs.M.W.Angel	1979-

TRUSTEES of the REIGATE SOCIETY

To enable the Society to hold assets, it was decided in 1983 to form a Trust. Since the last report two of the original Trustees have died and new appointments have been made. The Trustees now are:

J.N.Angel
E.K.Bourne

Miss M.G.Goss
Mr J.V.Lyndon Morgan

FRANK POTTER MEMORIAL COMMITTEE

The Committee is made up of the Chairmen, Hon.Secretaries and Hon.Treasurers of both the Reigate Society and the Reigate Society of Artists.

