

THE REIGATE SOCIETY

1952 - 1977

25 YEARS OF ENDEAVOUR

John Stammers

Published by The Reigate Society

The Reigate Society was formed in February 1952 at the instigation of Mr. Frank Potter and Mr. P. E. Budgen who were anxious about a great deal of tree felling and clearance of wild growth by the Borough Council in Reigate's public open spaces. A petition and other protests made to the Council had been rejected and it was decided to form a Society "to preserve all natural and architectural beauty within the locality of Reigate".

A committee was formed comprising:

Mr. F. H. Potter (Chairman)  
 Mr. P. E. Budgen  
 Mr. G. Burtenshaw  
 Mr. G. Chase  
 Mr. R. W. Hood  
 Mr. E. J. Lancashire  
 Mr. G. W. Langston-Day  
 Col. Lynn Allen  
 Mr. E. L. Morrall (Hon. Secretary and Treasurer)  
 Mr. G. T. W. Mould  
 Mr. E. E. Roberts  
 Mr. J. R. Stammers  
 Mr. C. R. Stephenson  
 Mr. H. W. Woolgar

and a public meeting for all interested was held at Reigate Priory on May 23rd 1952 to inaugurate the Society.

The Committee's immediate concern with architecture at that time was centred on the Priory. In 1942 an insurance company had purchased Reigate Priory with 69 acres and opened negotiations with the Council to develop the land with houses and shops and to use the mansion as offices. Public concern was aroused and pressure was brought to bear on the Council to refuse permission and to purchase the Priory as a Public Open Space and Community Centre. The Council responded to this pressure and an appeal by the owners in 1946 was refused by the Minister.

A public appeal was launched to assist with the purchase but, after £3,552 had been raised, the appeal was called off because it was then proposed that the mansion would be temporarily used for a limited period of 10 years as a County School. The money subscribed was applied towards the purchase because it was firmly stated that the Priory would return to public use after 10 years. However, 16 acres of the grounds were sold outright to the Surrey County Council for playing fields.

Most of the Reigate Society's founder members had taken part in the campaign to save the Priory and they were now concerned at a proposal to extend the period of the lease to 30 years.

Representations concerning the terms of the revised lease were made to the Council and it was eventually agreed that the Priory Mansion itself was to be readily accessible to the people of Reigate, the playing fields were not to be fenced in (as at first proposed by the Surrey County Council), and the grounds were generally to be kept in the character of what was described as a gentleman's park.

Included in the Council's proposals for the Priory was the provision of the Bell Street car park. The newly formed Reigate Society tried to persuade the Council to leave the original Priory wall intact and to retain some of the mature trees that stood in the car park area. They did persuade the Council to consult Mr. (later Sir) George Langley Taylor, the eminent landscape expert, regarding the trees and were delighted when this consultation was extended to cover the management of the whole of the Priory grounds and Park. In Reigate Park during the war years, there had been extensive tree felling which Reigate Society members considered indiscriminate, and the Langley Taylor report was welcomed by the Society as providing a programme of sound woodland management. The Society made a detailed study of the Langley Taylor proposals and proposed a number of amendments nearly all of which Langley Taylor incorporated in a revised report. The report was accepted by the Council but was not always followed by the Parks Superintendent and in the following years the Society frequently made representations about this to the Council, but without avail. During this period Miss Donkin, who was at the time Chairman of the Parks Committee, became a member of The Reigate Society as did several other Aldermen and Councillors.

In 1953 St. David's School in Wray Park Road was acquired by the Surrey County Council under a compulsory purchase order for use as the County Fire Brigade Headquarters and Training Centre. The Society co-operated with a body of local objectors but concentrated upon securing that satisfactory conditions were imposed in regard to the preservation of playing fields and trees and in regard to the proposed new buildings.

It was in 1953 that the draft Surrey Development Plan was published and this was studied by a sub-committee who sought to extend the Reigate Hill Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty to include Quarry Hill. Negotiations with the County Planning Officer in this respect were unsuccessful.

In 1954 the Society suggested to the Council that the wrought iron screen on the west side of the Priory courtyard ought to be restored. The suggestion fell on deaf ears and a long correspondence followed; in the end the Chairman of the Priory Committee was persuaded to meet Mr. Seymour Lindsay, then advisor on wrought iron to the Ministry of Works. The lady concerned recognised neither the importance of this fine piece of ironwork nor the eminence of Mr. Lindsay. She asked him "Are you an expert on wrought iron?" In reply he bared his arm and said "Scratch me, madam, and I rust". The Society obtained tenders for the repair of the screen and eventually, as a result of their persistence for seven years, the screen was excellently restored in 1961.

In the fifties, the Society's activities were largely concerned with trying to influence the decisions of the Parks Committee in the retention of the natural character of Reigate's open spaces, and the Council's Planning Committee in respect of densities, design, and preservation of trees and boundary walls and hedges. Their representations were successful in regard to Wray Park, a large estate stretching from Alma Road across Alders Road to Brightlands Road. An application from a developer to build speculative mock Tudor houses over the whole estate was refused and the estate was sold in separate half acre plots, with conditions imposed to protect the trees, resulting in a pleasant development with individual architect-designed houses.

In the early years of the Society, Frank Potter and later Charles Goody obtained seats on the Borough Council and both served on the Council's Planning Committee. A strong antipathy existed among some members of the Council against the Reigate Society, resulting in little genuine co-operation between the two bodies.

Whenever possible the Society supported the Council at Planning appeals and their interest was not always confined strictly to the Borough boundaries. At the request of local residents they tried to assist the Dorking and Horley Rural District Council in obtaining effective control over the pig farm at Kiln Lane, Betchworth where the buildings became an eyesore. In 1953 in response to a request from the Surrey County Council they supported the County Council in opposing the development of Gatwick as a major airport.

There are no records of the number of members in the nineteen fifties but from the accounts it would appear that membership grew from about 70 in 1953 to about 200 in 1957. The subscription was 5/- per year for which members received two or three magazines as well as the annual report. The magazines were on sale to non-members at 1/- each.

Members of the Reigate Society were able to give help and advice in the formation of other amenity societies, notably those at Betchworth, Sutton and Woking.

Footpaths were a constant concern and Mr. Budgen in particular walked many scores of miles to keep a vigilant eye on all the footpaths in the Borough as other members have continued to do in later years. The Council usually responded readily to the Society's reports on action required in connection with footpaths, repairs to stiles and signposts, etc. In 1959 the Reigate and Redhill Footpaths and Open Spaces Preservation Society became affiliated with the Reigate Society and their funds were made available to the Society.

In 1957 the Society was represented by Counsel at a public enquiry into the use of the disused Greystone Limeworks as a tip for 12 years of Croydon's domestic refuse. The Society's Counsel, Mr. Graham Mould, presented the case in a witty and persuasive way, in the course of which Croydon's Borough Engineer admitted to being "a municipal cuckoo looking for someone else's nest in which to deposit his eggshells"; but the Minister allowed Croydon's appeal. The Society gained many Merstham members.

In the same year the Society drew the attention of the Borough Council to their powers to control advertisements under the Town and Country Planning Acts and submitted to the Council a list of unauthorised advertisements and signs which the Society considered should be challenged. As a result a number of these were removed.

It was in 1957 that the Civic Trust was formed and representatives of the Reigate Society attended the inaugural conference at Lambeth Palace when Frank Potter spoke on the need to impress upon local authorities, local government officers, and educationalists the importance of taste and design in environmental matters.

Beginning in 1958 Arthur Hutchinson, through the Reigate Society magazine, drew public attention to the lists of buildings of architectural

and historic interest by a series of maps of different parts of the Borough surrounded by thumbnail sketches of the listed buildings. These maps were first published by the Society in periodic magazines and were reprinted and circulated to libraries, schools etc., in effect the first Town Trails. In 1958 the Society staged the R.I.B.A. Subtopia exhibition and in the same year began a campaign to encourage the maintenance of the many existing brick boundary walls and boundary hedges in the Borough, particularly where estates were being redeveloped. The Borough Council's co-operation was sought in this matter both in respect of conditions in planning consents and in their responsibility to maintain walls in public ownership; this campaign has continued for nearly 20 years.

In 1959 the Society staged an exhibition entitled Trees in Towns in the Rank Memorial Hall. Frequent representations were made on the subject of trees, particularly the retention of trees where new car parks were laid out or in road widening schemes, and also in connection with redevelopment schemes where in those days it was a common practice of developers to clear all trees from their sites before development commenced. In many cases the Society's suggestions were accepted and it gradually became the Council's policy to take all possible steps to safeguard trees when granting planning consents.

The Society was much concerned at the state of Wray Common Windmill and a structural survey of the mill was carried out to assess how much repair was needed. The Society lent professional assistance to the owner of the mill in an effort to obtain a government grant to assist in its restoration, and eventually the Society persuaded the Council to rescind its refusal to allow the mill to be converted into a dwelling, with the result that restoration was carried out.

The Old Town Hall contained the Public Library until it was rehoused in London Road in 1961. As soon as they knew of the proposed move the Reigate Society urged the Council to make the Old Town Hall a meeting place and exhibition hall for the use of local societies, having first ascertained how many local groups would be likely to make use of these facilities. The Council agreed and the Society presented them with a beautifully lettered board to take a poster at the entrance door.

One of the first moves of the Civic Trust was to pioneer the "Face-lift" in Magdalen Street, Norwich and the Reigate Society was quick to propose a similar scheme in Reigate High Street in 1959. They invited the Lord Mayor of Norwich to explain the Norwich scheme and eventually obtained the co-operation of 75% of the High Street frontagers; the Council agreed to make a contribution towards the fees of the Superintending Architect, Dr. A.M. Foyle, but negotiations took a long time and it was not until 1962 that Reigate High Street had its "face-lift".

The Borough Council contributed to the scheme by restoring and redecorating the Old Town Hall, but the Society tried unsuccessfully to persuade them also to replace the concrete lighting columns with slender bracket lights fixed to the buildings; this was eventually done about three years later.

The Society objected when the Council erected tall lighting columns with sodium lamps on Wray Common along Croydon Road. They succeeded in

preventing this type of lighting being extended along Batts Hill Road. An attempt to secure the land between Wray Common and Highlands Road as a public open space failed. Later when the Wray Common School was built, the need was established for a footpath along Batts Hill Road and, to maintain the rural character of Wray Common, the Society suggested a gravel footpath separated from the road without concrete curbs and tarmac, but this suggestion was not accepted and Batts Hill Road changed its character from a rural lane to a suburban street.

When an estate on the north side of the Common was developed, the Society approached the developers and secured the retention of the trees, hedges and fence screening the development from the Common, including the re-siting of one house to avoid tree felling.

In 1961 the Society prepared and submitted to the Council a comprehensive proposal for tree preservation orders covering the whole Borough. At that time there were no more than 28 Tree Preservation Orders in the Borough, most of which covered exceptionally important specimen trees like the cedars in West Street. The Society's scheme included blanket cover of a few comparatively large areas, and in many streets all trees standing in front of the building line; it was an ambitious scheme and was only "noted" by the Council, but in subsequent years orders have been placed on a great many of the trees included in the Society's scheme and there are now many hundreds of trees so protected.

In 1962 the Society brought out a booklet entitled 'Trees of Reigate', which included expert advice on the care and pruning of trees, advice which can now be obtained in official leaflets available free at the Town Hall. At the same time they planted a lime tree in West Street; on the back of 'Trees of Reigate' was a drawing by Frank Potter showing this as a mature tree, a state it is now approaching.

From its early days, the Reigate Society has always shown a deep concern for Redhill and the Society welcomed the Burns plan when it was first published in 1959. This was revised in 1961, one of the major changes being the proposed disappearance of a large part of the Memorial Sports Ground. The Society supported the general conception of the plan but expressed opposition to the removal of the Sports Ground to a site outside the centre of the town, and has been consistent ever since in resisting road proposals which would eat into the Sports Ground. The Society urged the Borough Council to appoint a Consultant Architect to be responsible for co-ordinating the redevelopment of Redhill and its landscaping. They also had meetings with the County Planning Officer to discuss the control of the quality of design in private redevelopment schemes some of which were already being submitted, because they feared that the rebuilding of Redhill presented opportunities which would almost certainly be lost if all initiative was left to private developers without any unifying control.

At various times the Society tried to persuade the Council to appoint an Advisory Panel of Architects to assist the Planning Committee. This was an offer made by the local branch of the R.I.B.A. and the panel was made available on an honorary basis. Panels were appointed in the neighbouring districts of Dorking and Horley and Banstead but in Reigate the proposal was resisted and, although at one time it was favoured by a majority of the members of the Planning Committee, the panel was never appointed.

In the first year or two the Society did not regard roads as a part of its field of interest, but the growing problem of traffic resulted in the formation of a Roads Committee in 1959. The Burns-Sanderson plan embodied a solution to Redhill's traffic problems and no-one imagined that for 17 years this would apparently come no nearer to realisation; consequently the Society's main preoccupation regarding traffic was with Reigate Town Centre. Proposals were submitted to the Council for minor changes in the traffic flow, palliatives that could very easily be put into force at little cost; but very few of these suggestions were tried. One way traffic was several times considered by the Council in the early sixties and was consistently opposed by the Society. In this the Society was strongly backed by the Chamber of Commerce and the High Street traders.

In 1961 it was learned that the Council proposed to widen Linkfield Lane, inevitably destroying its tree lined character. To avoid this the Society proposed a traffic arrangement whereby Linkfield Lane would be a one-way road. The suggestion was rejected but the widening scheme was not fully carried out.

Widening schemes were also mooted at various times for Wray Lane, mainly in order to provide a footpath. The Society suggested a scheme for a footpath which would avoid altering the character of the Lane, and this matter was under discussion on and off for several years, and has still not been resolved.

In 1961 the Society suggested the improvement of the dangerous junction by the Black Horse Inn on Reigate Heath. Their suggestion was at first rejected but in the following year the improvement was carried out precisely as the Society had suggested.

In 1963 the Civic Trust was offering awards for projected improvements to towns and villages, and Arthur Hutchinson and John Stammers jointly produced a scheme to replace an unauthorised and very untidy advertisement hoarding in London Road with a modest entrance to the Castle Grounds that provided an architectural link between the Reigate Auction Rooms and an adjacent shop. They hoped this would be the first move in upgrading the general character of this end of London Road. A model was made and the scheme was awarded third prize and a grant by the Civic Trust, and the Council showed sufficient interest in it to challenge the hoarding. The advertisers then made a formal application for a bigger and better hoarding which was immediately approved; so ended another constructive move by the Reigate Society.

It may appear from this record that the Society was constantly at variance with the Borough Council and this was often the case; but there were occasional instances of genuine co-operation. The Society continued to support the Council at Planning Inquiries and the Council occasionally asked for the Society's views. In 1961 they invited the Society to prepare a list of Buildings of Architectural and Historic Interest from the years 1800-1914. This was done but the Council's proposal to list these buildings was turned down by the Ministry. Now 15 years later the Department of the Environment have incorporated many of these buildings in a revised list, but in the meantime some have been lost.

In 1963 the Borough of Reigate celebrated its Centenary and there was much looking back over 100 years. The Society decided to look ahead and published a magazine entitled 'The Next 100 Years' in which it looked at Reigate and Redhill's problems and the ways the Society thought they should be tackled. The Society also staged an exhibition called 'Look at Your Town' in which material from the Civic Trust was combined with a presentation of the Reigate Society's work in past and present. In particular it contained a study of Earlswood showing how it could be improved by some degree of replanning and by relocation of non-conforming industrial users.

At the same time the Society urged the Council to halt the deterioration of Earlswood's residential amenities by the incursion of industry and to restore to the Common a large area of partially used allotments. The common area was eventually restored.

In the early sixties, the demand for building land was at its peak, there was intense pressure to relax the Green Belt policy, and the Minister of Housing and Local Government was encouraging high density development within existing built-up areas. In order to relieve pressure on the Green Belt and to minimise loss of trees and open space within the town, the Society advocated that tall buildings should be permitted in appropriate locations. Although at least four such schemes were approved only two were built, the Housing Association development on the north side of Reigate Road, where the Society negotiated with both the developers and the Planning Authority and were very satisfied with the results, and the flats at the Dome Redhill where the design was a great disappointment.

1961-64 was a period in which much redevelopment took place and the Society studied and commented on numerous major redevelopment schemes including those at Doods (top of Doods Road), Great Tylers (top of Batts Hill), Priory Park Garage (involving the demolition of two listed cottages and the engulfing of an ancient monument, the mediaeval undercroft), and Yorke Road (where several large houses were demolished and the sites redeveloped en bloc). In various ways the Society was able to exert quite considerable influence and it was found that a direct approach to the developers at the design stage was the most fruitful method of approach. On several occasions valuable trees were saved by the Society's intervention and it was suggested that the Council might require landscape schemes to be submitted as a part of detailed planning applications; this eventually became a part of their policy. Unfortunately Great Tylers (one of the 19th Century buildings recommended for listing), though it was preserved in the initial development scheme, was lost when the developers came back for a "second bite at the cherry".

In 1964 the Society became anxious about the future of the South side of Reigate High Street because they found that a major development company was "collecting" sites in this area, presumably with the intention of carrying out a large scale redevelopment. The Architectural Sub-committee under Eric Drew made a study of the area which had considerable potential and produced a scheme which provided for redevelopment on an appropriately modest scale and introduced a visual and physical link between the High Street and the Priory Park. This scheme allowed for a service road serving the rear of all the High



Street premises, which was then a Council proposal; taking advantage of the change of levels, it provided for car parking on a large scale on two decks but in an unobtrusive way; it also provided a small scale pedestrian shopping precinct and suggested a use for the Old Brewery Tower which was incorporated into the scheme.

The scheme was submitted to the Borough Council and to the County Planning Officer who was at that time about to start work on a plan for Reigate's Town Centre; it was offered as an illustration of the imaginative approach which the Society felt was needed in replanning the Town Centre, not as a definitive scheme to be executed. One of the leading developers was persuaded to show an interest in the scheme and the Society arranged for him to meet the Chairman of the Planning Committee. The matter was then left in abeyance until the County Planning Officer's proposals for Reigate should appear, all major re-planning proposals in the meantime being dismissed as premature. The Society was hopeful that the County Planning Officer would embody in his plan Town Planning possibilities of the type which the Society had envisaged, but this was not to be.

In 1964 it was decided to start a collection of colour slides both as a record of changing Reigate and as a facility for members of the Society giving lectures to schools and other groups. Arthur Hutchinson made available a collection of slides he already had and has since been custodian of the collection which he has built up to several hundred slides, illustrating every facet of the Society's interests. Members of the Society have regularly given illustrated talks on amenity to schools and other organisations, using these slides.

In 1964 the Merstham objectors to the Greystone lineworks tip decided to present the Reigate Society with the balance of their fighting fund in return for which the Society offered free membership for a year to all 94 contributors. Many of these continued to belong to the Society bringing the membership to over 500.

At this time the Society had several brushes with the Ministry of Transport. It was the time when Beeching was closing many of Britain's less used railway lines and the Guildford-Tonbridge line was threatened; the Society pressed for it to be kept open. The proposed routes of the M23 and M25 were published and the Society entered an objection while a study of this was made. In view of the impending construction of the M23 the Society objected to a proposal to widen the A23 between Merstham and Gatton Point to a 3-lane road; and they continued to oppose the Ministry's proposals for one-way traffic in Reigate, on which the Borough Council were still at that time undecided.

In 1966 the Society's Roads Committee produced a scheme for an alternative routing of the M23 and M25 to avoid cutting Merstham into four and at the same time Merstham residents formed the Merstham Protection Society under the leadership of Brian Webbe. This group adopted the Reigate Society's alternative routes and the two Societies worked together in the preparation of a case to be presented at the Public Inquiry into the motorway routes. Somewhat to the surprise of its authors perhaps, the alternative scheme, when scrutinised by traffic engineers, proved to be economic in construction costs, land take, residential property affected, and travel time, and it was clear that a strong case could be presented at the Inquiry in February 1968.

The Borough Council opposed the M23/M25 proposals but did not offer any alternative. They did however commend the Societies' alternative proposals as being worthy of consideration by the Minister, and in the end they paid the Societies' costs which amounted to about £650. This low figure was on account of Brian Webbe's generosity in presenting the Societies' case without a fee.

The granting of money to the Societies presented a problem to those members of the Council who belonged to the Reigate Society, and most of them resigned in order to be free to vote in favour of the grant. Needless to say, the Inspector dismissed the alternative routes in favour of the official routes and the long and painful process of constructing the motorways began. The Merstham Protection Society merged with the Reigate Society and the Merstham Committee was formed to watch Merstham's interests in particular.

In 1965 the Commons Registration Act was passed and a record of all Common land in the Borough was prepared by Miss Donkin and what was then called the Commons and Open Spaces Committee of the Society (hitherto the Flora and Fauna Committee). This record was accepted by the Borough Council as a basis for registration. In the same year the S.E. Regional Hospital Board's proposal to take a considerable area of Earlswood Common for an extension to Redhill Hospital raised a strong protest from the Society and led to the formation of the Reigate and Redhill Common Land Preservation Committee which worked closely with the Reigate Society in opposing this incursion into common land. A petition was raised and resistance continued until 1968 when the Hospital Board withdrew the scheme in favour of a new hospital adjacent to the Royal Earlswood. This was one of the alternatives the Society had suggested in the first place.

In 1966 the idea of one-way traffic in Reigate was again resurrected by the Divisional Road Engineer and this time the Council decided to accept it in principle. The Society began a campaign against one-way traffic and were strongly supported by the Chamber of Commerce and the Reigate High Street Society. A petition was presented to the Council and a public meeting was held at the Town Hall which was not large enough to accommodate all the objectors who queued up outside the doors. In 1968 a Public Inquiry was held at which Jack Griffith presented the Society's case, which the Inspector rejected; a rear-guard action was fought over the closure of Tunnel Road, but in the end one-way working began in 1970 and raised a storm of protest from the people of Reigate.

In 1967 the Civic Amenities Act was passed, providing among other things for the creation of Conservation Areas and the setting up of local Advisory Committees, and encouraging closer co-operation between Local Authorities and amenity Societies. The Government emphasised the importance of Public participation in Planning and the Society saw ahead the prospect of a new era of partnership with the Corporation.

The Society immediately prepared detailed proposals for four Conservation areas covering Merstham village, Reigate Town Centre, the St. John's district in Earlswood, and the Flanchford Road cottages facing Reigate Heath. Many photographs were taken and fully documented reports were prepared and sent to the Reigate Council and the Surrey

County Council, and copies were also displayed in the public libraries. The Society also offered its services on any Advisory Committee which might be set up.

No comment was heard from either of the authorities and it eventually transpired that both of them had lost the Society's illustrated reports.

The Surrey County Council announced their intention of designating Conservation Areas in Merstham and Reigate but rejected the Society's proposals for Earlswood and Reigate Heath. Later the St. John's area was reconsidered, and is now likely to receive designation.

In July 1968 the County Planning Officer's plan for Reigate Town Centre was published and the Society was dismayed to find that it was little more than a traffic solution with none of the other essential ingredients of a proper Town Planning Scheme.

Furthermore the proposed solution consisted of a three lane Ring Road around Reigate's centre, part of which was to pass through the northern edge of the Priory Park. Discussions followed with the County Authorities and a special meeting of Reigate Society members was held on September 23rd when the Society's Committee were given a firm directive to examine alternatives to the official scheme. The Society did produce an alternative scheme and found that this met with support from the Surrey Archaeological Society, the Chamber of Commerce, the High Street Society, and a newly formed group called the Priory Park Association.

The Society made detailed objections to the Ring Road proposals and their alternative scheme was submitted for the authorities' consideration, but there was no reaction until in 1971 it was announced that there was to be an exhibition at the Old Town Hall when public comments would be invited on the two schemes. The Reigate Society were not permitted to take any part in the preparation of the exhibition and their scheme was presented without reference to them and without mention of the Society. A continuous tape ran during the exhibition giving a highly biased account in favour of the official scheme. The exhibition was continuously manned by four or five officials who explained the proposals to visitors. In spite of this heavily weighted presentation public comment was 5 to 1 against the Ring Road and 3 to 1 in favour of the Society's scheme. These figures are adduced from the official report as the Society were not allowed access to the books in which the comments had been recorded. The authorities decided to proceed with the Ring Road scheme, leaving the Society somewhat puzzled as to the purpose of the exhibition.

The Reigate Town Centre controversy involved a great deal of work and much time in collaboration with other groups, but in the meantime the Society's work had continued in other fields. A great effort was made to alleviate Redhill's growing desolation, as planning blight emptied more and more shops and a general atmosphere of decay developed; a special working group was formed for this purpose under the Chairmanship of Tony Trollope and, in collaboration with the Chamber of Commerce, the Society tried to arrange for attractive displays to brighten empty shop windows, but it was found that this would make the empty premises

rateable so the idea fell through. The Society produced a scheme of tree planting, paving and seats in Station Road which was financed jointly by the Society, members of the Chamber of Commerce, and the Council, and was carried out in 1970.

Gatwick Airport became a matter of concern in 1969. The Society set up a study group to examine the proposals for expansion and their likely effect on Reigate and a detailed report was prepared. The Society decided to raise no objection to the immediate proposal to lengthen the single runway, but reserved its position regarding a second runway and other aspects that would affect Reigate. Anxieties were temporarily relieved when the Government decided in favour of Maplin in 1970.

In 1969 the Society staged the Civic Trust exhibition "Who Cares?". This was European Conservation Year and the Society was disturbed at the prospect of this being celebrated by the demolition of some 18th Century cottages at St. John's and of The Firs, a notable Regency house in Redhill. The Firs was due to make way for a roundabout and the Society pressed for the alternative of traffic lights. The roundabout scheme was modified to miss The Firs, and later was abandoned entirely. Further representations were made about designating a Conservation Area in St. John's.

Also in 1969 the London Road car park was formed and the Society suggested that this was an ideal location for semi-mature perimeter trees. They had to be content with two small fastigiate cherries.

Some trees in the poplar avenue in the Priory were blown down about this time and many Society members pressed for replanting. The Committee was undecided about this and in the end when the whole avenue was felled it was generally agreed to be a visual improvement. The removal of the avenue had been one of Langley Taylor's original recommendations.

From 1971 the Merstham Committee worked hard to minimise the damaging effects of motorway construction and managed to enlist the co-operation of the contractors, the railways, the Council and the police, while maintaining good relations with all concerned. Even the badgers had full consideration and several were caught and transported to Dorking before their earths were bulldozed.

The Society was anxious about the effect of the short length of M25 ending at Reigate Hill and, fearing an increase in traffic in Reigate's one-way system and in Wray Lane, they pressed for the early extension of the M25 westward and for a link between M25 and A25 at Pebble Hill; they also suggested ways in which Wray Lane could be prevented from becoming a feeder road to the M25.

With the publication of the Government's Strategic Plan for the South East, there was talk of permitting wedges of development in parts of the Green Belt and several developers hopefully submitted applications for building on Green Belt land on the southern edge of the Borough and also to the north where a large out-town shopping centre was proposed. The Society strongly supported the Planning Authority in

rejecting these applications and the Borough Council and County Council reaffirmed their determination to maintain their policy of protecting the Green Belt.

From 1971 onwards the Society arranged working parties to clear overgrown footpaths, and several footpaths which had become almost impassable were opened up.

This year saw the 50th anniversary of the gift to the people of Reigate of Reigate Park by Mr. and Mrs. Randall Vogan shortly after the first World War. The Society had always been concerned at the tendency for public open spaces to become gradually urbanised and the specific terms of the Vogan bequest, that the Park should be maintained in its natural beauty, had always had a special appeal. The Society presented a seat to celebrate the anniversary.

In 1972 the Society's Architecture and Planning Committee worked closely with the Surrey Archaeological Society who set up a co-ordination Committee to work for the preservation and recording of listed buildings. The Old Wheel and Cherchefelle were two buildings that gave special cause for concern. The Old Wheel had been in danger since the death of the owner two years earlier and because of its importance to the street scene, the Society was seeking to get its status as a listed building upgraded. However, the new owner succeeded in getting consent to demolish it bit by bit and in 1972 it finally came down in spite of the strongest representations by the Society. Although it dated mainly from the 17th Century with 18th Century additions, the myth was circulated that it was not an old building at all. Cherchefelle, formerly the Police Station, had been empty since the Police moved out, and it remained empty while the new owner pursued a long negotiation in an attempt to use it as offices. Inevitably vandalism and severe deterioration occurred. The Society felt obliged to support the refusal for office use, since consent could have resulted eventually in its replacement by a new office building. The house still stands empty and the Society continues to try to ensure that it is adequately maintained.

Traffic presented serious and growing problems in all parts of the Borough, and the Society suggested various improvements to mitigate the nuisance and danger - in Redhill, South Merstham and elsewhere. In Reigate the combined effect of increasing traffic and the one-way system had a disastrous effect on the shopping centre, and the Society decided to go a stage further with their alternative to the official Ring Road proposals. In 1974 they commissioned Mr. Keith Armstrong, a consultant traffic engineer, to make a further study of the traffic problems and to examine the feasibility of the Society's relief road proposals, particularly in the light of considerable changes in methods of traffic design since the preparation of the official proposals in 1968. It was found that with minor modifications the Society's proposals would provide a perfectly workable solution, much more cheaply than the official scheme and with no damage to architecture or open spaces.

1973 was National Tree Planting Year and the Society raised a fund from members to plant trees in positions in the town where they would

be most valuable. They encountered official resistance and had to negotiate with the Council for three years before they finally managed to get some trees planted in 1976, in and around the Cromwell Road car park.

Another contribution the Society made, through its Merstham Committee, was the conversion of the little garden in Merstham High Street which, through the energy and contributions of some members, was planted, paved and furnished with seats, and so converted from a weed-infested eyesore into a pleasant amenity.

When in 1973 Reigate, Banstead and Horley were combined into one Borough the Reigate Society had to consider whether to extend their activity over the whole of the new Borough. There was already a well established Federation of Ratepayers Associations in Banstead and, although their field of interest did not coincide exactly with that of an amenity society, it was thought best to confine the activity of the Reigate Society to the boundaries of the old Borough and to maintain a close and friendly liaison with the Banstead Federation.

The Society's Council saw the creation of the new Borough as an opportunity to bury once and for all the antipathy that had persisted between the Society and the Local Authority, and they arranged annual meetings with the Mayor and Senior Officers to exchange views on matters of particular concern.

In the following year Surrey County Council launched a programme of public consultation that was to lead to the eventual publication of a Structure Plan for Surrey. In the first stage a series of study papers were issued on a variety of topics. The Society formed a study group and prepared detailed comments on all papers relating to amenity. The draft plan is soon to be published.

1975 was European Architectural Heritage Year and the Society put forward two initiatives to mark it in a tangible way. One was to restore the Old Town Hall to its original attractive form by opening up the interior at ground level and laying out paving and planting to the east and west in a more interesting way; a model was made to illustrate the proposal. The other was to improve the pedestrian route between the High Street and the "Woolworths" Car Park by some very inexpensive alterations. Though the year passed without either scheme being achieved, it is still hoped that these improvements may in time be carried out.

Children were encouraged to interest themselves in both their architectural heritage and in natural amenities by a project energetically arranged by Mrs. June Yeatman with the co-operation of many school-teachers and others, and with some financial aid from the Borough Council. The project was called "OUR TOWN - YOUR FUTURE" and a share was taken by nearly every school in Reigate, Redhill and Merstham, culminating in an exhibition at the Technical College in Redhill and at Reigate's Old Town Hall.

Out of this arose a big increase in Junior Membership amounting to over 400 children, who have already furthered the work of the Society

in a variety of ways, not least by a sponsored "litter pick-up" in Reigate and Redhill's open spaces.

Adult membership had by now risen to over 900 and increased postal charges made communication with members impossible without sharply increasing subscriptions. A personal delivery system was evolved and by the kindness of a number of members postal charges have been almost eliminated.

In 1975 the Society published a Town Trail, prepared mainly by Richard Woodhouse and Dennis Turner, covering the more interesting buildings in Reigate Town Centre. 3,000 copies were quickly taken up by young and old and very soon a reprint had to be issued. A Town Trail for Redhill is now being prepared.

The Society took a close interest in the proposal to erect a statue in honour of Dame Margot Fonteyn and arranged several events to help raise money and arouse interest in the scheme.

1975 saw the successful result of negotiations that had continued over several years regarding the diversion of the A23 in Redhill. The line first laid down invaded the Memorial Sports Ground and, if the intention to dual this road were ever carried out, about a quarter of this valuable open space would have been lost. A long struggle followed in which the Reigate Society worked closely with the Redhill Action Group. An alternative layout was suggested by the Society, saving the Sports Ground from all but the loss of a very small corner. Surrey County Council finally produced a revised scheme very similar to the Society's suggestion.

The later years of this account have necessarily given only a selection of the Society's very extensive work and much has had to be left out. Work continues in pursuit of the Society's aims - to protect our heritage of architecture and natural beauty, to stimulate others to take a pride and interest in these things, and also to look ahead, trying to influence the contribution of our own time to the development of the ever changing town.

Over the years the Society has learned to be patient but persistent. There have probably been more failures than successes, but often where initial failure has caused disappointment, success has been achieved years later. The Society does not attempt to usurp the authority of the elected Council, but rather to work side by side with authority, recognising that in the end our aims must be the same. Maybe there are sometimes differences in emphasis - if the choice has to be made we put peace before speed and beauty before progress.

After twenty five years of endeavour an exhibition has been mounted to look back over some of our past efforts, and to state the attitude of the Society to the problems that face us now. That attitude can hardly be expressed better than in Margaret Sheppard Fidler's poem written for this occasion.....

ODE FOR THE 25th ANNIVERSARY OF  
THE REIGATE SOCIETY

---

REIGATE

Nature has endowed you richly with beauty.

---

Most fortunate of towns,  
With splendid woods  
And sweeping Downs  
With quiet streets,  
And pleasant homes,  
And many a heritage  
In stone and story.

Beware! You are the guardians  
of today, and ancient glory.

The march of progress comes  
And often takes too high a price:

When all the lovely trees are down  
And speed has killed the friendly town  
And laid it as a sacrifice  
Upon the altar of the wheel,  
Oh, who shall care — but we who feel  
We citizens —  
Shall we not dare, to call a halt  
To things we HATE?

And build and plan  
More worthily, for every man.  
Lend all your strength to this ideal  
AND MAKE IT REAL.

This is our town, our home,  
OUR PLACE,  
And proud with symbols of our race:

Preserve our heritage of grace  
TODAY.

Tomorrow — it may be too late.

Margaret Sheppard Fidler



OFFICERS OF THE REIGATE SOCIETY 1952 - 1977

Chairman:	F. H. Potter	1952 - 64
	M. H. Prance	1964 - 68
	J. R. Stammers	1968 - 71
	J. H. Alleyn	1971 - 73
	A. G. Sheppard Fidler	1973 -
Hon. Secretary:	E. J. Morrall	1952 - 57
	Mrs. G. Cowell	1957 - 59
	W. A. Hutchinson (temporarily)	1959
	J. V. B. Harford	1959 - 60
	Mrs. J. Pierce	1960
	L. F. Stemp	1961 - 63
	J. S. Stead	1963 - 64
	E. J. Hiatt	1964 -
Hon. Treasurer:	E. J. Morrall	1952 - 53
	C. R. Stephenson	1953 - 61
	J. M. B. Wolfe	1962 - 66
	W. Toomey	1966 -
President:	F. H. Potter	1964 - 68
	Miss M. Donkin	1968 - 71
	J. R. Stammers	1972 -
Registrar:	R. W. Hood	1964 - 71
	Mrs. E. M. Forbes	1971 - 77
	W. Gee	1977 -