

THE REIGATE SOCIETY
1984-91

MARY GOSS

A continuation of the Short History by John Stammers
entitled; "25 YEARS OF ENDEAVOUR. 1952-77"
and "THE NEXT SEVEN YEARS 1977-84" by John Nauen.

Published by: THE REIGATE SOCIETY

P R E F A C E

To mark its Jubilee in 1977, John Stammers, a founder member, wrote 'A Short History of The Reigate Society 1952-77'. This was up-dated in 1984 when John Nauen wrote 'The Next Seven Years 1977-84'.

Seven more years have now passed and another up-date seems appropriate. As I have been closely associated with the work of the Society during this period, as Secretary and as Chairman, I undertook to record its progress from 1985 to 1991.

The Society's main aim is to preserve and enhance what is best in the local environment. To quote its publicity leaflet:-

'The Society works through its Council to inspire, initiate and co-ordinate events to enhance the district. It seeks to influence potential developers, planning authorities and other public bodies including central Government.'

Mary Goss

1985 saw the completion of the first stage of the Redhill Town Centre re-development. The A23 was re-routed to take traffic away from the town centre, shops were opened at ground floor level in the Warwick Quadrant, and the Harlequin Theatre and new library were opened at first floor level. The Redhill Committee of the Reigate Society had been closely involved in these developments.

In Reigate, traffic problems continued to engage the Society's attention. The question of the Town Centre Relief Road was raised again when the Surrey County Council staged an exhibition inviting comment on three proposals; a southern route along the edge of Priory Park; a northern route involving a two-way circulation along London Road and Castlefield Road; and a 'do nothing' option in the hope that the imminent opening of the M25 would bring relief. Public opinion was in favour of the northern route which had been suggested by the Reigate Society in 1972. A decision in favour of this route was not made until 1990.

Also in 1985, The Civic Trust with which the Reigate Society is registered instituted 'Environment Week', with the theme 'know your local environment and enjoy it'. The Reigate Society took up the challenge and an ambitious programme of walks, visits and lectures was organised by John Nauen. We were honoured by a visit from the founder of the Civic Trust, Lord Duncan Sandys.

The Society has done something each year to mark Environment Week, the latest being 1990 when an exhibition on 'Conservation Areas' was staged in both Redhill and Reigate. A measure of the success of Environment Weeks is the way that both the Borough Council and the Surrey County Council have now taken up the challenge and are planning their own programmes in which the Reigate Society participates.

In 1987 much time was devoted to discussions with the developers of two large scale town centre developments, one in Redhill and the other in Reigate. In this the Society worked closely with the Chamber of Commerce with which it had formed a liaison group. The Redhill scheme got off the ground first and is nearing completion (1991). The Reigate scheme met with more problems and a start could not be made until the completion of the Bancroft Road Multi-storey Car Park. By this time the developer had run into financial difficulties and proposed a more modest shopping scheme together with two more office blocks without which they claim the development would not be viable. They lent their revised plans to the Reigate Society seeking its support. Discussions are still going on.

A group of members led by Dennis Turner organised the removal of a 17th century house from behind 43 High Street, Reigate, to the Weald and Downland Open Air Museum at Singleton. The Reigate Society contributed to its re-erection which is not yet completed. However work was sufficiently advanced for a visit by us in 1989.

The main event of 1987 was the great storm in October which had a devastating effect on the landscape. Conspicuous was the almost total destruction of the stand of beeches on Reigate Hill. The Reigate Society, which throughout its history has cared

for trees, raised £700 from the membership, much of which was passed on to the Mayor's appeal. Another storm in January 1990 did further damage and subsequent droughts have seriously affected re-planting plans.

The main issue of 1989 was the planning application by Hepworth Minerals and Chemicals to develop the site of their worked-out sandpits at Holmethorpe following a recommendation in the Surrey Minerals Plan that the site should be safeguarded for a rail-linked aggregates depot. Hepworth's planning application included the aggregates depot, a ready-mix concrete plant and an estate for light industry. In exchange for planning permission they offered to build a new road under the railway to give much improved access to the congested Holmethorpe Industrial Estate. The Merstham Residents' Association mounted a vigorous campaign which the Reigate Society supported, Douglas Nightingale acting as liaison officer. As a result, the applications were called in by the Secretary of State for the Environment and a local enquiry was held in July. The Reigate Society was ably represented by John Nauen who based our opposition on Green Belt grounds. We were proved correct when the Secretary of State disallowed the application for the industrial estate because it would seriously breach Green Belt Policies.

However, the Borough Council felt that the need for the road to relieve Holmethorpe was so great that the only solution to the problem was to take the area of the applications out of the Green Belt and thus open it for renewed planning applications. The proposal appears in the Deposit Draft of the Borough Local Plan (January 1991). The Reigate Society will again support the Merstham Residents Association in their opposition.

A problem which has caused the Society much anxiety in the last seven years has been the vastly increased number of planning applications, peaking at 1900 in 1988. The Architecture and Planning Committee monitor these but has to confine its detailed observations to conservation areas; listed buildings; green belt; and environmentally sensitive schemes. There has been little conflict with the Council planning officers and the Society shared their concern at the number of appeals to the Department of the Environment against planning decisions. In 1988 40% of appeals were allowed, particularly for office developments. The problem was analysed in an article in the 1988/89 Annual Report. Recently (March 1991) there has been a welcome dramatic decrease in the number of planning applications. Motivated by declining standards in shop fronts and shop signs, members of the Architecture and Planning Committee have surveyed the shops in Reigate Town Centre. They hope to persuade the Borough Council to issue and enforce regulations to achieve a higher standard. A small display on this work was mounted at the Surrey County Council's Environment Day on May 18th 1991 at the Reigate Priory.

The Reigate Society's concern for trees has already been mentioned. Emphasis in the past was on preservation of existing trees and the planting of new ones. However it is now realised that scrub and trees are invading open spaces at an alarming rate. Many familiar view points such as Reigate Hill, Reigate Park and Redhill

Common have been lost. Two valuable habitats, chalk grassland and lowland heath, are in danger of disappearance. When grazing of these areas ceased, rabbits kept the scrub down until the advent of myxomatosis in the 1950's all but wiped them out. A careful policy of management is now advocated with the controlled removal of offending trees and scrub. The Society's Natural Amenities Committee monitors these developments and strongly supports the work of the local Conservation Volunteers who are doing valuable work on Reigate Heath. On Reigate Hill, the National Trust is trying to preserve chalk grassland, even to the extent of re-introducing controlled grazing by sheep.

In the countryside changes are pending with the Government's policy of 'set aside' in agriculture. Planning applications for use of redundant farm buildings are already increasing and there are many applications for the construction of golf courses on land which can be released from farming. All this will need careful monitoring to preserve the character of the countryside.

The Roads Committee of the Society has tackled the ever-increasing problems of traffic and parking. It has kept in touch with the Borough and County Councils calling their attention to particularly serious problems. Long pressure from the Society resulted in one-way systems in Wray Lane and Nutley Lane and remedial measures in the narrow part of Gatton Bottom. Hopes that the M25 would relieve traffic congestion in Reigate were soon dashed, but improvements at the A23/M23 junction in Hooley offer some hope for the future.

The future of the railway line to Reading is a matter for concern. Though there are no firm plans as yet, it seems likely that the line will carry increasing traffic from the Eurotunnel to link up with the main railway net-work at Reading. The effect of this on our notorious level crossing is a problem for the future.

The Society no longer has a special committee for Gatwick, so the Roads Committee keeps an eye on developments there. We are members of the Gatwick Area Conservation Campaign (GACC), a strong watch-dog organisation. The helicopter link between Gatwick and Heathrow was successfully opposed.

After the completion of the Warwick Quadrant, the Redhill committee continued to examine planning applications which were mainly for offices far in excess of the amount envisaged in the Redhill Local Plan of 1984. Many of these applications were won on appeal. Much attention was paid to the future of St. Annes, a huge 19th century school building which was a conspicuous land-mark in Redhill. It has now been demolished and the site is being developed for housing.

In the summer of 1988 the committee was involved in consultations with the Borough council on plans for the pedestrianisation of the High Street and the possible establishment of a street market. The committee took issue with the Council on the amount of planting included in the scheme. It wanted more. Part of the plan has been carried out and will be continued after the completion of the Belfry shopping centre.

The pattern of lectures, social events and outings has remained unchanged. The lectures arranged by the officers and committee chairmen, while John Nauen has organised a wide range of visits, including The Thames Barrier; The Mary Rose at Portsmouth; Dover and The Weald of Kent; Singleton; Eurotunnel and Rochester. The highlight of all these activities was the second Frank Potter Memorial Lecture held in February 1990 when David Battie, a director of Sothebys and a TV personality gave a lecture on 'The Art Market' to a capacity audience in the Harlequin Theatre.

Communication with members continues through the Annual Report and three Newsletters each year. This tends to be one way and the Officers would welcome a greater response from the membership.

From time to time the Society has recorded the deaths of prominent members who have been active in its affairs. In 1989 John Stammers, a founder member and Past President, died at his home in Devon. In 1990, another Past President, Alwyn Sheppard Fidler, who played a full part in the Society's affairs right to the end, also died. Full obituaries were published in the Annual Report in 1990.

A feature of the last seven years has been the increasing public awareness of environmental problems frequently reported in the media. At local level it takes the form of concern for the preservation and enhancement of the environment which has always been Reigate Society policy. Now there are many other organisations in the field; some are new, while others have raised their profile. One such is the Surrey Society, the County branch of the Council for the Protection of Rural England, which is setting up district committees. One of these, under the Chairmanship of Dennis Turner, covers the Borough of Reigate and Banstead. The Reigate Society hopes to co-operate with these organisations as the need arises. One possibility being considered is the formation of an Environmental Forum to discuss environmental matters with the Borough Council.

From time to time the Society is asked to comment on planning documents which come with increasing frequency and take up much of the officers' and committees' time. In 1980 the Surrey Structure Plan, a framework for local plans was published and throughout the 1980s documents concerning the first revision were circulated. A new Plan was published in October 1989. This was followed by a leaflet 'Surrey 2000' asking for observations on the next plan. Also in January 1991, the Surrey County Council issued a consultation Report, 'Surrey Countryside Strategy', which they hope will be incorporated in the next Structure Plan.

1987 saw the publication of the Consultative Draft of the Borough Local Plan. In January 1991, 3.1/2 years later, the Plan went on Deposit.

The Reigate Society is in general agreement with the policies expressed in these plans, but how far they can be implemented in times of financial stringency remains to be seen. Monitoring of these plans will be an important part of the Society's work in the future.

OFFICERS of the REIGATE SOCIETY 1984-91

President:	A.G.Sheppard Fidler	1980-85
	J.Lyndon Morgan	1985-90
	Sir Peter Masefield	1990-
Chairman:	E.K.Bourne	1983-86
	J.N.Angel	1986-89
	Miss M.Goss	1989-
Hon.Secretary:	F.Jones	1984(Jan)-85
	Miss M.Goss	1985-89
	J.N.Angel	1989-
Hon.Treasurer:	J.A.Nauen	1979-
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. The Trustees now are:

J.N.Angel	J.A.Nauen
E.K.Bourne	Mrs.M.Woodward.

FRANK POTTER MEMORIAL COMMITTEE

The Chairmen, Hon.Secretaries and Hon.Treasurers of both the Reigate Society and the Reigate Society of Artists.