



BERKHAMSTED LOCAL HISTORY AND MUSEUM SOCIETY

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www.berkhamsted-history.org.uk

Founded 1950 as Berkhamsted & District Local History Society

Winter Newsletter 2020

I am sorry to begin this newsletter by reporting to you the death of two members: **Monica Diplock** and **Roger Osborn** both of whom were born in 1924. Roger was born in Bell Lane, Northchurch, was educated at Victoria School, which he left age 14 to become a Telegraph Boy and later a postman for 45 years in Berkhamsted. As such there was hardly a road or family that he did not know, he was extremely attached to the town. Upon retirement he was awarded the Imperial Service medal. After an awfully long engagement he married 'Elsie', the 'love of his life', she worked in service at the Coopers big house 'Shenstone' Roger would often sneak a few words when delivering the post. Roger's immense local knowledge and factual recall was exceptional. Any query we could not answer was immediately answered by him, often with a long back-story. In fact, I only very recently spoke to him about the 'Mystery Painting' (see below) and sent him a copy in the post. He phoned me straight away saying it was the top of Gravel Path- a route he knew very well on his bicycle delivery rounds. He gave lectures to our society on The Post Office which many of you will remember.

The Mystery Painting mentioned above was bought on e-bay recently. It is an accomplished watercolour roughly A3 sized. Its un-signed but the back says '*Berkhamsted March 1927*'

I have another painting the same size on my wall at home which is signed by Agnes Turner. It is titled '*Berkhamsted Common*' Here are both to compare:



Mystery Painting. 'Berkhamsted March 1927'



Berkhamsted Common by Agnes Turner

I think you will agree that both are likely to be by the same hand and show a high level of skill. We have discovered that Agnes Turner lived at '*Beverley*' in Charles Street (but have not yet been able to identify the house). We hold six other paintings by Agnes Turner in the Museum Store but are unable to access them currently for comparison. Does anybody recognise where the first picture could be? Roger told me it was the top of Gravel Path by the golf club, but I have been unable to locate the house with the sloping roof. Can anyone help?

We have decided to roll last year's **AGM** over to next year, which complies with our constitution. More details to follow early next year.

Dacorum Heritage Trust Proposed Changes - Important Information. Norman Groves writes:

In early October 2020 the Society, and similar voluntary-sector bodies across Dacorum Borough, received to their great concern re-organisation proposals from the Board of the DHT, the Council-funded body that was set up primarily to support community heritage groups (see * for list) by storing and curating nearly 80,000 of their heritage items, such as photos, documents, maps, audio, and objects collected over many years. The BLHMS owns 29,000 of these.

The DHT proposal. The DHT state it is their intention to remain an independent organisation only caring for and developing its own collection, (built up since 1993 to over 52,000 items). In addition, the Trust would only offer formal storage arrangements for those collections that are not owned by the Trust. This will be achieved as follows:

1. Societies donate their collections in whole or part to the Trust; or
2. Societies have a storage contract with DHT (with unspecified costs, services provided and terms); or
3. Societies remove their collections from the Museum store, within three months of notification of the intention to remove. (Additionally, we have also the material from the Northchurch Society which is now garage/attic stored as the DHT say they can't accession it.).

Further proposals are made concerning a new membership structure for the DHT, which would give the heritage societies little influence, and require an annual subscription. Plus, a new public engagement strategy has been produced by DHT, without targets and measures to assess its efficacy, and without request for our views in its development. However, the Strategy states *"our most important [engagement delivery] partnerships are with the constituent societies, and they will be engaged with all DHT activities."*

Background. Towards the end of the c20th, to meet threats to the storage and preservation of heritage owned by history and archaeology societies in Dacorum, the societies pushed for an "umbrella" body, the DHT, with a prime role to support the constituent voluntary bodies by storing and conserving their heritage collections with good conservation standards. After a campaign, the Borough Council supported this central body with free accommodation (still behind the Civic Centre, Berkhamsted) and an annual grant (now £58,000) to pay for professional museum staff.

This is a win-win, cost-effective situation, with the DHT able to use the items owned by societies for pop-up displays and research, community societies have their treasured heritage preserved under museum-grade conditions, and the Council gets the nucleus of a museum service, at bargain basement cost.

However, the main non-winners have been the public as the level of meaningful, accessible heritage engagement is much poorer compared to nearby similarly sized boroughs, and public sector day-to-day investment in heritage support has been extremely low for many years.

The view of your Committee. We have written at length to the Council, and to DHT, seeking withdrawal of the proposals and meaningful prior consultation on all issues, including operational ones that have concerned societies for several years. To quote from the letter to DHT: -

"From this Society's perspective, the "Way Forward" abandons a partnership approach by saying that the DHT should be the sole beneficiary of the Council's accommodation and cash

support (probably £80,000+ in all, depending on how the footage is valued?). Grassroots, membership-subscription, educational charities such as ourselves, totally volunteer supported, would be excluded from benefitting from this public financial support. More than that, the societies are actual co-funders of the DHT setup alongside the Council, either by donating assets or paying cash, while the DHT houses and increases its collection without contribution.

These proposals are not only unfair, but they are also very damaging to all our engagement services, and potentially fatal for many third sector bodies. They will certainly diminish the quality and extent of heritage provision and co-ordination in the borough, for locals and visitors. If the local societies were forced to take their collections out of the Store it would be a huge, expensive, and time-consuming logistical challenge, needing much management research and preparation, especially if there were no re-distribution of the Council's "pot" for this heritage."

However, we may indeed, if all else fails, have to find a new, secure, environmentally stable, very low cost, and suitably sized (about 500 ft², or 45m²) storage solution. Ideas and offers are very welcome about possible spaces, and indeed about much-needed funding sources.

Your Committee would be happy to keep you informed about developments, so please indicate if you have a particular interest.

*Constituent societies of the DHT are, from their website, and apart from BLHMS:

Berkhamsted & District Archaeological Society, Berkhamsted Town Council, Dacorum Borough Council, Dacorum Borough Council Archaeology, Flamstead Society, Hemel Hempstead Local History & Museum Society, Kings Langley Local History & Museum Society, The Graham Greene Birthplace Trust, and Tring & District Local History & Museum Society. They give no mention to Wigginton!

On top of this the Civic Centre area, including the DHT store, is due for a change of use (into residential) according to the Dacorum Development Plan.

At our (virtual) committee meeting we welcomed **Dr James Moir** who has been elected to the committee, many of you will know him from his works on other local groups such as the Rectory Lane Cemetery and the BCT. He has taken over from Norman Groves as lead of the Heritage Hub.

The Chronicle is on-course for another bumper issue next March to be printed by Gemini (Northbridge Road) due to the closure of Strong's in March. Deadline for copy is end of Jan 2021, we welcome your research/local book reviews etc.

**Berkhamsted Castle Trust news:
Chairman Adrian Barham writes:**

Notwithstanding the pandemic, and the initial lockdown from late March onwards, the past few months have actually seen a significant amount of activity on the part of Berkhamsted Castle Trust (albeit mainly not public facing). Although the visitors' room at the Castle has not been able to open at all this year, the Trust was able to keep the Castle grounds open for a large portion of the summer, thank you to **Ken Wallis** for his daily duties of unlocking/locking up and grounds inspections. Significant numbers took advantage of the open space for their daily exercise. English Heritage managed to arrange for a pilot of a historically themed "escape room" type game to be run at the castle daily from 14 August until late September, with over 1500 people taking part. And for the Heritage Open Days event (11-20 September) the Castle Trust still managed to run four of its traditional, free guided tours — although, for social distancing reasons, these were restricted to just six participants per session.

In late August, the owners of The Crystal Palace pub submitted a planning application to convert the pub into three residential properties. On 23 August, the Castle Trust (and BLHMS) submitted a nomination to Dacorum Borough Council for The Crystal Palace to be listed as an Asset of Community

Value (ACV), with the intention of preserving the building for use as a pub and combining that with use as a larger visitors' centre for the Castle / wider use for heritage purposes. Unfortunately, the ACV nomination was rejected by the Borough Council. After significant objections to the planning proposals, the owners withdrew the planning application. However, it was resubmitted on 13 November. The Castle Trust (and BLHMS) has therefore likewise resubmitted its ACV nomination, and has launched a public campaign to save The Crystal Palace pub. For more information, please see the new website at: www.crystalpalace.pub

Those of you on Facebook will know about our fabulous presence there, thanks to **Linda Rollitt** who posts regular extremely good topical local history posts, they attract much interest, and comment. To-date it has 1,850 'liking' with 2,000 'following'. Also go to our website www.berkhamsted-history.org.uk For more Local History goodies! Likewise, **Jenny Sherwood** not only writes the local history page for *Your Berkhamsted* Parish Magazine but also for *Berkhamsted Living* free magazine. These should help satiate your local history hunger.

The programme of events has had to be cancelled. The speakers booked are rolled over for when we can hold talks again. Meanwhile our programme secretary **Chris Armstrong** is investigating on-line broadcasts. We would welcome your views on this and any ideas you may have. Meanwhile Chris has been keeping busy by copy-typing local articles from back-issues of *Hertfordshire Life* magazine, some of which date back to the 1940's. So far, she has transcribed over 200.

Heritage Open Days

These went ahead as well as could be with the Covid restrictions and our great organiser, **Jenny Sherwood**, considered it a success. Huge thanks to all our volunteers for leading these free local tours. Special thanks to **John Caldicott** and **Lydia Carmichael** who were filmed presenting for the superb virtual tour at Ashlyn's for the Foundling Hospital. Also, to **Richard Shepherd** who presented a wonderful virtual tour of 'The Battle of Berkhamsted Common'.

News from our Treasurer, Richard North:

Gift Aid. Many of you will be aware of the country's Gift Aid scheme whereby a charity is able to boost its income by 25% on any donations made to it by UK taxpayers. The Society has now applied to HMRC to join this scheme and once our application is approved all eligible donations to the Society made by UK taxpayers, including the annual membership fee, become eligible for Gift Aid. If you are a UK taxpayer, we will still however need your permission to reclaim the Gift Aid from HMRC, and you will need to complete and return what is called a 'Gift Aid Declaration'. These forms will be sent out next year with the '*The Chronicle*' and added to the annual membership renewal form from 2022.

Payment of Annual Membership Fee. Many members still pay their annual membership fee using cheque or cash. To help reduce the amount the Society pays in bank fees (we must pay for each paper cheque that we pay into the Bank) it would be extremely helpful if you would consider switching the payment of your annual membership to bank transfer, or alternatively setting up a standing order with your bank. If you can do this, please contact our Membership Secretary, **Robin Gee** robin.gee@btinternet.com 01442 874598, who will be able to provide you with the necessary details.

It is only right that I finish by thanking the committee for all their hard work this year despite incredibly challenging circumstances. We have not been idle, as I hope you can see, and 2020/21 will definitely be a year to look forward to. Stay as safe as you can in your bubbles this Christmas.

Mary Casserley

Chairman BLHMS
