

THE COCKPIT

NEWSLETTER OF THE CHISLEHURST SOCIETY
(formerly the Chislehurst Residents' Association)

FOUNDED 1934 REGISTERED WITH THE CIVIC TRUST

The Cockpit, on Chislehurst Common, has been the traditional meeting place for Chislehurst people on all great occasions from time immemorial

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The nights draw in . . .

As Winter approaches, the daylight hours get distinctly scantier, the temperature drops and the weather worsens. As individuals and as a community we draw the curtains and move closer to the hearth — psychologically if not also physically! Let us not forget that the elderly, the disabled, mothers with young children and not least our precious wildlife, all find the winter months difficult in many ways. Inevitably, many of us work outside the Chislehurst area, returning here only for nights and weekends. We have to make an especial effort to maintain a community spirit here, so that Chislehurst may thrive as a true community and not become a mere dormitory for those whose foremost concerns lie elsewhere. A helping hand to a neighbour in need, a saucer of milk for the local hedgehogs, a moments consideration before parking a car — we can all do something.

ROAD "IMPROVEMENTS" AT WAR MEMORIAL JUNCTION?

The attention of the Chislehurst Society has been drawn to a recent proposal by Bromley Council's Highways Department to launch a feasibility study for so called road improvements at the junction of the A222 and A208 at the Chislehurst War Memorial. We do not know what the study will involve but we believe that it is likely to be along the lines of a GLC proposal, made some years back, for considerable road widening. This would undoubtedly entail the loss of much of the Common land and its trees on all four corners of the junction, and would require the re-positioning of the War Memorial to a spot where it would be less inconvenient for motor traffic. It is alleged that the "need" for these "improvements" is due to the number of accidents which have occurred at this junction. No doubt one factor, as local people will be only too well aware, is the jumping at the lights where the two main roads cross.

The Society, of course, is concerned about road safety. But these days, in circumstances of this kind, the emphasis is on traffic management and traffic calming measures. It should not be assumed that environmental considerations inevitably play second fiddle to the demands of road traffic flows. A road scheme along the

lines the Council's Highways Department appears to have in mind would destroy the charm and attraction of one of Chislehurst's most important Conservation areas. Royal Parade includes a number of listed buildings, and the vista from the *Bull's Head* to the War Memorial is a delight to the eye. This would be lost for ever. Shifting the War Memorial to a new site would be a shameful act of desecration. The removal of a Memorial to the fallen of two world wars so as to accommodate thoughtless and incompetent driving behaviour is no example to set our young people.

Fortunately, largely due to the efforts of Chislehurst Councillor Mrs. Wykes and Councillor Mrs. Moir of Bickley, the proposal was rejected. But Chislehurst residents should be warned. This kind of proposal, once made, is not necessarily permanently shelved. Moreover it is not difficult to imagine that if this scheme were to be allowed to proceed the further destruction of Chislehurst and its Commons would be proposed in order to create a four lane highway from the A20 to Bromley.

STOP PRESS

Members will be glad to know that Councillor Mrs. Wykes has given your Society's Chairman a categorical assurance that any feasibility study, as proposed by the Chief Engineer, will be opposed should this matter be brought up again. Councillor Mrs. Wykes welcomes the support of your Society in opposing any such study.

CARING CHISLEHURST

Help wanted, please! Bromley HospisCare have lost their charity shop premises in Orpington and are looking for alternative accommodation. The premises do not have to be permanent — a shop which is unused while waiting for planning permission, for instance, would be greatly appreciated. If any member has, or knows of, such property available for rent, Barbara Sammut would be very interested to hear from them on 0689 20027, after 10am. There is a number of unoccupied shops in Chislehurst High Street — and no charity shop!

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ARNOLD LOVELL

Members will be saddened to know of the sudden death of long-serving Executive Committee member, Chairman of Bromley Residents' Federation and member of Chislehurst Commons Conservators, Mr Arnold Lovell. Arnold was particularly concerned with the blight of litter on our environment (see KC3 campaign, below). He will be remembered for his sincere love of Chislehurst and his determined efforts to preserve and enhance the area. Our condolences are extended to his wife and family at this sad time.

LITTER: KC3 CAMPAIGN

Paths and open spaces on the Commons still collect litter. There are organised sweeps from time to time, by the Friends of the Earth for example and on London Anti-Litter Day (30 March 1990) by volunteers from Coopers School. The areas swept look clean for a day or so, but the litter soon returns. A daily picking up of the rubbish is more effective.

Chislehurst Conservators' small work force devotes much of its time to litter clearance, but there is a limit to this if the more positive work of looking after the Commons is to be tackled. Some much appreciated litter clearance is carried out by volunteers as they walk along the footpaths. They take a plastic shopping bag with them and pop discarded rubbish into the bag as they stroll along. In the spring, some local people received Bromley *Pride of Place* awards for their anti-litter activities as did your Society's Vice-Chairman, Bruce Hurn for his anti-graffiti work.

More volunteers are needed. Many Society members walk on the Commons footpaths more or less daily, or perhaps have houses looking on to part of the Commons. The Chairman of the Chislehurst Conservators, Mr. Lindley-Jones suggests that individual members might be prepared to take on responsibility for keeping specified areas of the Commons clear of litter. If sufficient volunteers come forward it should be possible to keep the Commons virtually litter free on a permanent basis. Certain areas are particularly bad, although volunteers do their best to keep them litter free. The path from the War Memorial area to Coopers School needs more attention, especially (it has to be said) in term time, but also after warm summer evenings. Another black spot is the Prickend Pond area and the bus-stops on the Commons can be very bad. No complex arrangements are envisaged. Volunteers would simply nominate a particular patch and, when it was convenient, would pick up the litter in their patch, depositing the rubbish in one of the many litter bins on or around the Commons. Volunteers will find that there can be considerable personal satisfaction in keeping their own "patch" litter-free.

If you would like to join in this scheme would you let Frances Follin (467 0512) know the stretch of Common you propose to adopt. Overlap does not matter too much, but no doubt volunteers will be prepared to be flexible.

That master-piece of modern technology, the litter picker, can be loaned to you if bending down is too difficult or painful. We can also supply black plastic bags.

KC3? Keep Chislehurst Commons Clean, of course.

Arnold Lovell

PAVEMENT PARKING — or Vandalism in a Vehicle

In recent months your Society has received a number of complaints about vehicles parking on pavements, in particular in the High Street opposite the Police Station!! This has been taken up with the Police who said they are very aware of the problem and have in fact issued a number of 'tickets'. Apparently quite a number of the drivers who were caught are Chislehurst residents!! Our members are — surely? — more responsible.

Motorists may not be aware that it is an offence to park on the footway and if convicted they could face a fine of £400.

Everyone is put at risk by parking on the footway, but especially the elderly, the disabled and the visually handicapped who may be injured by walking into wing mirrors or the vehicles themselves. People in wheelchairs, pushing prams or push-chairs may be forced into the road by lack of space — this has happened when cars have been parked outside the *Queen's Head*.

Another factor which is often overlooked is the damage to the pavement itself. Damaged paths can cause pedestrians to fall and injure themselves. Sometimes services beneath the pavement are also damaged and the community has to bear the costly repair.

So motorists please **DON'T** park on the pavement. Chislehurst is the only shopping centre in the Borough where there are plenty of free car parks, so there is really no excuse for what is effectively a form of vandalism!

If in future you see an inconsiderate driver **DO** complain to the Police. They deserve our support in combatting a dangerous nuisance. This also applies, of course, in respect of cars parked on yellow lines.

A BACKWARD GLANCE AT "CHESILHERST HEATHE"

Few who walk across Chislehurst and St Paul's Cray Commons realise the changes which have occurred over the last hundred years. There was widespread concern, after the damage from the Great Storm of October 1987, that the trees should be restored. A little research shows, however, that the trees are relatively new!

The 1680 Map of Chislehurst in the British Museum shows the present common as "Chesilherst Heathe". Much later maps, Victorian photographs and histories show the area to have been heathland, with gorse and heather predominant. As recently as 1912, J. W. Marriott wrote of "*the green and purple carpets of St. Paul's Cray common, (where) there are three varieties of heather.*" Today very little heather remains. There are two patches of common heather on St. Paul's Cray Common, dating back to the fires which destroyed the woodland in the drought of 1977. The heather seeds had presumably lain dormant in the soil until fire destroyed the trees and scrub. The seeds germinated in the ashes. In just over a decade, silver birch and oak seedlings are growing in the heather, and unless extracted will allow the woodland to regenerate itself.

In the past local people must have had grazing rights on the Commons. The Lord of the Manor at Scadbury, however, had the right to cut the timber, to dig the gravel (hence the hollows and ponds in various areas), and to hunt. These Manorial rights were bought by the Conservators for £350 in 1894. Since 1886 Chislehurst Common has been protected from encroachment and

damage by the Conservators, who were originally granted a penny rate. St. Paul's Cray Common has been similarly protected since 1888. Until 1920 there was some grazing by horses and by cattle from a nearby farm, during the day time only. It was the decline of grazing which allowed the woodland to regenerate, first silver birch, which has light wind-blown seeds, and later oak, whose acorns were buried by squirrels and jays from much older oak trees on the boundaries of the Commons.

During October 1989 I measured the tree rings of as many of the fallen oak trees as I could. The oldest fallen timber I measured was on or close to the boundaries, with the very oldest, near Holbrook House, 120 years old. Most were much younger, 50-80 years old, dating back to 1907-1937. The standing oaks were also largest on the boundaries, with the oldest (near to the Scadbury boundary) dating back to approximately 1775.

Another factor was the changing recreation patterns in S.E. London. On Bank Holidays in particular, Londoners came in their droves to Chislehurst Common. There was a fair with races on Whit Monday, donkey rides and other amusements. Fires, broken glass and orange peel were a problem for the keepers in Victorian England, just as litter is a constant problem today.

Public support and encouragement for the work of the Commons Conservators and the Chislehurst Society remains essential if we are to continue to enjoy a remarkable natural amenity, a mere 10 miles from central London. © A. Sennett 1990

A GOOD TIME WAS HAD BY ALL — at Foxbury

When your society held a social meeting for members at Foxbury on July 19th, the response was excellent. Tickets for the event quickly sold out (disappointed applicants will have priority for our next social in May) and those who attended enjoyed a very entertaining evening.

With the benefit of a perfect summer's evening, members wandered through the charming grounds of this interesting old house, sat on the terrace to enjoy a drink and a chat or explored the rooms on the ground floor. A short and fascinating account of the history of Foxbury was given by Chislehurst's Chief Librarian, Mr Roy Hopper. Foxbury's friendly and efficient staff then served the evening's refreshments: a very generous cheese board together with rolls, biscuits and garlic bread. Members did their best but — alas! — could not manage to eat all the food laid out for them. A welcome cup of coffee brought the evening to a close but not before a few lucky members had won prizes in a surprise raffle.

The cost of the evening, including refreshments, was only £6 per person (your society passed on Foxbury's charge at cost to ticket-buyers). A few people commented that they would have liked a more elaborate buffet or meal; this can certainly be arranged for future occasions if there is sufficient interest. The key factor, as always, is cost. Another social will be held in May; members views on the type of refreshments preferred and the amount they are prepared to pay (please be realistic!) will help us to plan for it.

CPRE ON THE ROAD

The controversial subject of national roads development was tackled by the Council for the Protection of Rural England at their Summer conference *Roads to Prosperity or Roads to Ruin*, attended by a representative of your Society. Various alternative schemes for improving and/or extending the national road network were put forward by the Department of Transport, the Kent Trust for Nature Conservation and the CPRE. The latter, supported by a distinguished transport economist from Reading University, put forward proposals which seemed most realistic to our representative and met with general approval at the conference.

The Department of Transport's case is that there is an ever-increasing volume of passenger and freight transportation, mostly travelling by road and with particular pressure on east-west routes. Bromley is crossed by both north-south and east-west traffic!

Reassuringly, the Department of Transport denied the existence of secret plans to build more motorways than have already been publicly announced. From what was said at the conference, however, our representative inferred that plans for further motorways might well be formulated in the future. Such schemes will be very expensive but our representative asked if the cost/benefit analysis included provision for the implicit subsidy made by residents who suffer the effects of road improvements. Few of you will be surprised to learn that no monetary value is set on residents' discomfort or inconvenience or, indeed, on the permanent loss of fields, woodland and other wildlife habitats. 25 acres of land are lost for every mile of new road!

CPRE's positive suggestions for coping with our increased need for transport included greater use of the rail network, better provision for public transport, traffic calming measures to reduce accidents (rather than widening roads or building more of them) and provision of cycle tracks. The slower cars travel, the more of them can occupy each mile of road space (the stopping distance of vehicles being reduced at slower speeds so that they can travel closer together). Such measures have been effective abroad, whereas building more roads is ultimately self-defeating — the more roads there are, the more people use them!

The arguments on all sides are necessarily complex and affect the whole country. The Department of Transport's plans for the foreseeable future, as they affect Bromley, are most worrying for their emphasis on east-west traffic flows south of London — the spectre of a "south circular motorway" is still haunting the planners! Members with views, suggestions or questions should write to our MP, Roger Sims, at the House of Commons — "Public opinion" means your opinion. Make the government aware of it!

PLANNING TO PRESERVE

Readers of *The Cockpit* will have seen references in the past to your Society's Planning Sub-Committee, so you might like to know what it does on your behalf.

The Planning Sub-Committee is composed of four members of the Society, reporting to the Executive Committee. The Chairman is Mr. T. Turner, the Secretary is Miss P. L. Howley.

The Secretary monitors the weekly lists of planning applications issued by London Borough of Bromley, extracts details of all those which are relevant to

Chislehurst and informs Road Stewards by circular of those which most concern them, so that they can alert members affected.

Every month, there is a meeting of the Sub-Committee at the Civic Centre, when every new planning application for development in the Chislehurst area is subjected to detailed examination. Usually, no fewer than 30 such applications are involved. A comprehensive report is prepared about those applications where observations or objections by the Society are considered to be necessary, due consideration being given to members' views when available. After endorsement of the report by the Executive Committee, letters detailing the agreed objections or observations are sent to the Chief Planner, London Borough of Bromley. Sometimes, additional information is received subsequently about a particular planning application and further elaboration is considered necessary. In such a case, the Planning Sub-Committee Chairman prepares a supplementary letter, addressed to the Chief Planner and, in addition, sends a copy to every Councillor serving on the Council's Committee responsible for dealing with the application concerned. This ensures that the latest views of the Society are available to Committee members before the planning application is considered. The amount of work involved in preparing well-reasoned objections is considerable and may involve site visits and discussions with interested parties. Moreover, success at local level sometimes requires further representations in the event of an Appeal to the Secretary of State for the Environment.

There is no doubt that the London Borough of Bromley takes considerable note of your Society's views on planning applications. This is confirmed by the feed-back received from both Councillors and Officers.

Anyone may examine applications, on request, at the planning enquiry desk at the Civic Centre. If you wish to object or comment on a proposal you should do so by writing without delay to the Council's Chief Planner, London Borough of Bromley, Civic Centre, Rochester Avenue, Bromley, BR1 3UH. If you feel that you need the support of the Society, you should send a copy of your letter to our Chairman. Your views, if not already covered by the Society's representations, will then be made known by the Society on your behalf. The telephone number of the Society's Chairman is given at the foot of page 1 of this issue of *The Cockpit*.

It is sometimes stated that "The Chislehurst Society objects to everything". Statistics prove this to be incorrect. Of a total of 317 planning applications examined during the year ending March, 1990, the Planning Sub-Committee recommended that immediate objections be made to 124, i.e., to fewer than 1 in 3 planning applications relating to Chislehurst. It is hardly surprising that some objections are necessary, as a large part of Chislehurst is designated as a Conservation Area of which a large proportion also falls within the Green Belt, all of which needs to be defended against undesirable development.

BENCH MARK FOR SUCCESS

Two members have independently suggested that your Society should present public benches to the community of Chislehurst, as a tangible sign and reminder of our work which would be appreciated by all who sat on them! The bus stop at Belmont Parade and the area in front of Sainsbury's are the suggested sites.

There are certainly local precedents for such gifts to

the community; there are several donated by various associations in Petts Wood Square and in Chislehurst members may have sat upon the seat, near St Nicholas Church, placed as a memorial to Clifford Platt. Mr. Platt was the longest serving Commons Conservator (37 years) and was Chairman of Petts Wood Management Committee for 35 years. He wrote a book, *In Trust for Chislehurst*, in which he told the story of the fight to defend our open spaces — a fight which continues today. Readers may be interested to know that a revised edition of this book will be published if sufficient funds can be raised for the purpose. While sitting on the Clifford Platt bench, one has an ideal opportunity for quiet reflection on the importance that all open spaces have for us and our responsibility to defend them for the enjoyment and well-being of future generations.

Members who feel that more such benches would be a useful addition to our public places might also like to reflect on the cost! Your Society's funds will not stretch to such amenities at the present but, if there were sufficient interest among members, a special fund could no doubt be set up. Your views please!

Alun Jones Memorial Award

This award, for environmental projects by pupils and students at local schools and colleges, has been launched this year. Details have been sent to all the educational institutions in Chislehurst and we look forward to seeing some splendid entries. They will be on view in Chislehurst Library next summer.

Prizes will be awarded by age group, the cost being met from the Alun Jones Memorial Fund, to which Barclays Bank, Chislehurst, has recently made a generous contribution.

TEAMWORK

Your Society has joined forces with the London Borough of Bromley and Barclays Bank to present a pictorial display of the attractions of the Chislehurst environment. This could be viewed in Barclays window in our High Street branch early in October. We hope you all had a chance to see it but if not, you will have a second chance when the display goes on view in the Library from 12th November. Comments, please! Our thanks are due to LBB and Barclays for making this display possible.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Oh Dear! I have had some "feedback" on the last issue but hardly the multitude of suggestions, criticisms and ARTICLES I had hoped for. Your Society needs all the help it can get, not only with *The Cockpit* but in all sorts of areas of interest — whatever talents, abilities, knowledge or skills you may have, **WE NEED YOU**. If you can become involved in any way please contact our Chairman, Tom Brown, or me.