



Sopwell Residents Association

NEWSLETTER

For all residents of Sopwell

Issue 17
Autumn 2010

From your editor

The Sopwell Project has taken off in a big way. We, especially me, have been having great fun this past few months interviewing some local residents about their memories of living in Sopwell and looking at old maps and documents and we have found out some very interesting facts about how the area used to look. Mrs Day remembers being a land girl and working with the cows and horses in the fields where Mandeville School is today. Mrs Terry spoke about living in Sopwell Lodge on Brown's farm (near Sopwell Hotel). She also lived in Vesta Avenue when it was first built so there were lots of memories of living there. Mrs Sinfield remembers how she and her friends used to take jam jars and go "tiddling" in the Tar river as the locals called the Ver. Bill Mackenzie recounted tales of Pearce's Iron Dump, Fenny's stables and Fenny's wood behind the ruins. He also set me off on a trail to discover more about a murder in the allotments on the Nunnery site – see below. Does anyone else remember any of this? There are lots more memories which will eventually appear on the website in due course. If anyone else would like to tell us their stories please phone me on 865061.

Amongst others, we are still short of a tenant representative on our committee. If you have some spare time and are willing to represent us, please get in touch. There is a lot of information sent to me about training opportunities for tenants which I have to bin because I don't have any one to give them to.

Sandy Norman SRA Chair

Celebrating Green Sopwell walk in September

Following on from the success of the Sopwell walks in the last two years, we are planning another walk around the Sopwell area this Autumn. It will take place on **Saturday 18th September 2010** and we will be meeting at 2pm in the Nunnery open space in Cottonmill Lane. Congregate around the benches.

We plan to walk Cottonmill Lane to the New Barnes Mill area and then along the golf course and back to the Nunnery open space via the Alban Way.

As usual we will illustrate the walk with the history of the area including some of the interesting information and stories gleaned from talking to local residents as part of the Sopwell project. The walk will be led by Chris Pudsey and Councillor Eileen Harris. At the end there will be refreshments. Come and join us as it should be very interesting. Enquiries to Sandy on 865061.

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If you live in Sopwell, you are automatically a member of Sopwell Residents Association. There is no charge to join and events are free.

Contact details

23 Tavistock Avenue
St Albans AL1 2NQ

info@sopwell.org.uk
www.sopwell.org.uk

Cyclists news



Sopwell Wheelers meet up with Alban

On 22nd June - St Albans Day - a small group of Sopwell residents met up with Alban for a short Roman theme evening cycle ride following the course of some Roman roads in and around Sopwell which Alban may have once travelled. During our ride, Alban drew attention to some of the sites he knew well, such as the bath house - now Branch Road - and the Roman temple and royal Celtic burial on Oysterfield just north of Verulamium. We then followed the course of the former Colchester road to where it crosses Beech Bottom Dyke where our breath was taken away by the sheer size and depth of the Dyke. We returned to St Michael's where we stopped for a refreshing pint at the Six Bells.

Railway to Cycle Way – A trip down memory lane (or rather track)

In the Autumn, the SRA is planning a gentle family cycle ride along the Alban Way out to Smallford. The date is not yet decided as our ride will be tied to a forthcoming exhibition

“Lost Rails” at the Museum of St Albans, which will tell the history and development of the District’s former railway lines, one of which being the former Hatfield to St Albans branch line. We hope this exhibition will evoke fond memories of a past era and that you will come and share them with us. For further details see www.sra.org.uk.

Report of AGM

Our 7th AGM was held on 8th June in the Marlborough Pavilion. As part of the usual business, Peter Segers, our Secretary gave a very interesting annual report with photographs using PowerPoint. It is amazing what we have achieved in the past year. We organised a walk, cycle rides, bulb planting, a litter pick. We were involved in Larks 2009, installation of two new benches, tree planting. We obtained a £500 grant for research into Sopwell’s history and have been busy interviewing residents and visiting archives. We have undertaken surveys of visitors to the Nunnery Green Space and applied for a grant to build a boardwalk by the river. We have responded to many consultations and expressed concern over the Abbey station hump, the Multi-use games area, litter bins etc, etc. This is as well as running the website, producing and distributing newsletters and holding committee meetings. Didn’t we do well! You can read the full report on our website.

After the formal part, we were given a very interesting presentation by Peter Bloomfield of Transitions St Albans. Peter explained how Transition Towns is a movement to prepare our towns and cities for the twin challenges of peak oil and climate change. In the coming decades, climate change and peak oil will require us to radically re-think our lifestyles, and adopt a way of life that uses less energy. This will need government legislation, and it will need individual actions, but we don’t need to wait for either of those. Transition Towns is about empowering communities to pull together and start grassroots initiatives in their local areas. We were given a photograph of a vegetable asked to guess how far some vegetables have to travel to arrive in our supermarkets and the resulting cost to the environment. Growing and buying local produce is one solution which can help resolve this.

Aerial photos of Sopwell in the 1940s onwards obtained from the National Aerofilms Collection were displayed at the back of the room. They triggered off a few memories from those present. The evening ended with some refreshments including wonderful cakes baked by Ananda Armstrong King.

Sopwell Project - Murder in the Nunnery green space

One of the more exciting stories, gleaned from interviewing Sopwell residents about their early memories, came from Bill Mackenzie of Watling View. Bill remembers waking up early one December morning in 1948 and looking out of the landing window – he lived in Cottonmill Crescent then - and seeing police vans over at the stables. The stables were where Nunnery Stables is now. Being a young inquisitive lad he went to have a look. A body was found just outside on the allotment side of the fence. This was too good a story to pass up so I did some research looking at the microfilm copies of the Herts Advertiser in the library and found further details. The body was of Stephen Varley from Watford who worked at de Havilland’s in Hatfield.

“It was about 8o’clock on Sunday morning that his partly-clothed body was foundThe man who made the tragic discovery was Mr Frederick Howe of 43 Bernard Street....he has an allotment close to where he found Varley. There were several other gardeners at work when Mr Howe arrived to collect some greens for Sunday dinner.

Varley, a widower,was battered about the face and head on Saturday night. His body had been carried about 100 yds along the footpath from the road and dumped by a wicket fence and in the shadow of the wall of the ruins of the ... Sopwell Nunnery. There were no signs of a struggle. The Chief Constable of Hertfordshire.... ordered a systematic search to be made ...of the allotments and a dump adjacent to the ruined Sopwell Nunnery (this was the scrap metal yard run by Pearce’s).....One important discovery was that of Varley’s mud stained shoes on an allotment some distance from where his body lay. But the dead man’s trousers and jacket could not be found.”

Chief Inspector Robert Fabian of Scotland Yard (anyone remember the TV programme?) was called in as well as an eminent forensic pathologist Dr Keith Simpson but despite every effort to trace two men who had been drinking with Varley the night before, they never solved the murder. If you want to read more of this fascinating story, a full report will be on the website

www.sopwell.org.uk

Sandy Norman

Next issue

The next issue will be out next Spring around Easter 2011. If you have any items for inclusion or you wish to advertise please go to the website and leave a message. Advertisement charges: £50 for half a page and £25 for a quarter page.

Herts Policing Plan

Earlier this year, I was privileged to represent the Sopwell Residents Association at the launch of the Hertfordshire Police Authority Policing Plan for 2010-2013. The Plan is available on the internet at www.hertspa.org. The meeting I attended was well presented, and showed a lively interest in policing matters. I am sure we are all interested in having an efficient police presence, and I would like to mention one or two points of particular reference, both generally and with regard to us as a community. A requirement

for visible policing is always a matter of public concern. There is a pledge that the police service in that Neighbourhood Policing Teams will spend at least 80% of their time, working visibly in their neighbourhoods.

In the Chief Constable's written introduction to the Plan, he states that over the past five years, Hertfordshire Constabulary has continued to make good progress in reducing crime levels, detecting more crime and bringing criminals to justice. He adds that Hertfordshire has low crime levels, and can claim to be one of the safest counties in the country. It is one of the stated purposes of Hertfordshire Constabulary to drive down crime and anti-social behaviour.

With regard to anti-social behaviour, there was a presentation at the meeting in which CCTV footage showed teenagers making a nuisance of themselves. Police will endeavour, where appropriate, to speak to those responsible for troublesome young people. This will hopefully result, as has been known to happen, in a parent being shocked to be told that their child was involved in anti-social behaviour. Hopefully, this would avoid that youngster causing trouble again.

The Plan refers to frontline Neighbourhood Policing resources being protected, despite the Hertfordshire Police Authority facing unprecedented financial pressures. The Plan was published before the recent change of government, and while maintaining the strict neutrality of SRA in political matters, it is very much to be hoped that the spending cuts policy of central Government does not impinge on policing.

To summarise, I came away from the meeting impressed by the commitment to the public by the Hertfordshire Police Authority.

Rick Taylor

Anti - social behaviour: Fly tipping

In the previous issue, we asked you politely to remember to cut back overhanging foliage which is a nuisance to pedestrians. Now we would like to have a moan about fly tipping which as you know is the dumping of your household rubbish in an undesignated area. Not only does it look unsightly it costs the Council thousand of pounds a year to remove it. Apparently sixty thousand tonnes of waste was dumped in England and Wales alone last year which costs between £100 million and £150 million to remove. This is paid for by the general public in their Council tax. Every pound spent on waste is money that could be better spent on other council services such as education and social services.

In *Fly-tipping and the law: a guide for the public* produced by ENCAMS it says: "**Fly-tipping waste is illegal and therefore if you fly-tip you are committing a serious offence and can be prosecuted. There are several pieces of legislation relating to fly-tipping. In England, Wales and Scotland, the main legislation is the Environmental Protection Act 1990 (EPA 1990), Sections 33, 34 and 59. ...Fly-tipping fines are up to £20,000 and/or six months' imprisonment. Fines are unlimited if the case goes to the Crown Court, and up to two years' imprisonment, and up to five years if hazardous waste is dumped. It is also an offence to permit or authorise fly-tipping on land where a Waste Management Licence is not held. Where fly-tipping involves the use of a vehicle, the driver can be prosecuted, as can the owner of the vehicle. The police have powers to seize vehicles used for fly-tipping.**"

If you do see someone fly-tipping or would like to report an area where fly-tipping has taken place, make a note of the date, time and place and the type of waste and how much there is. Make a note also of any vehicle involved including the registration number. You can then report it to the Council on 0845 1258000 or a.cleanerdistrict@stalbans.gov.uk.

It does not make sense for someone to go to great lengths to dump an old mattress or fridge and leave it in a public place when they could easily transport it to the local dump or phone the Council to come and take it away. The nearest Household Waste Recycling Centre is Waterdale, which is in St Albans Road, Nr. Garston. WD25 0PR

Did you know?

- There is now a battery and low energy light bulb recycling centre at Sainsbury's? Please take advantage of it and take your used batteries and light bulbs there.
- There used to be a hunt in St Albans. The hounds were believed to have been kept opposite Sopwell Nunnery Farm run by Pearce's. On the right is a photo of the hounds in the 1930s in Cottonmill Lane, courtesy of Mrs Terry from High Oaks, St Albans. She said the hounds used to come every week and they exercised them down the lane.
- The Local Strategic Partnership and the Council have commissioned a Feasibility Study into options for developing the Marlborough Pavilion into a more flexible community space. The aim is to generally improve the building and enable more than one group at a time to use it.
- In the early part of WW2, Bren gun carriers used to be parked up Doggetts Way and Wilshire Avenue manned by the Seaforth Highlanders.



Useful Contacts for Sopwell Residents

Councillor Eileen Harris: 831611 Councillor eileenharris555@btinternet.com

Councillor David Poor: 833670 David.Poor@btinternet.com

Councillor Roger Axworthy: 812681 rla@notmhs.fsnet.co.uk

County Councillor Martin Frearson 761878: mfrearson@ntlworld.com

Litter fly-tipping, graffiti: 0845 1258000 or a.cleanerdistrict@stalbans.gov.uk

Faulty road or pavement surface: 01438 737320 or www.hertsdirect.org/highwayfaults

Oxfam Herts Hike - Saturday 25th September - Sandridge

Come for a lovely day out in the beautiful Hertfordshire countryside, and help raise funds for Oxfam's work at the same time. The annual HERTS HIKE for Oxfam offers a series of circular and waymarked walks, all starting and finishing in Sandridge and taking in the new Heartwood forest. Choose from a mini hike, 8, 11, 14, or even 20 miles. Make a donation or get sponsored – ideal for all ages and abilities. To register your interest & for more information go to www.oxfamstalbans.org or ring 01727 837229 / 869775.

St Albans NCT Nearly New Sale: September 19th 10.15 - 11.30 am.

Bag a bargain and beat the credit crunch! Come to our Autumn/Winter Children's Nearly New Sale at Nicholas Breakspear School, Colney Heath Lane AL4 0TT where you can get good quality items at reasonable prices for you and your family. This is a very popular sale. You can kit out a nursery, get new seasonal wardrobes for your children or refresh the toys in the playroom for much less than you can on the high street. We sell: Baby Equipment (large & small); Spring & Summer Clothing (Birth to 7 years); School Uniform (4 to 7 years); Maternity Wear; Cloth Nappies; Toys, Books & DVDs.

Large hall, parking, all items sorted together (not table top sale). £1.50 minimum admission donation (in aid of NCT Charity)

Due to health and safety concerns we cannot let buyers bring buggies into the sale. Non-members welcome.

For more details: www.stalbans-nct.co.uk, 0844 243 6276 general@stalbans-nct.co.uk

Penny Waterman School of Dance

Exercise in a fun way with professional teachers - www.pennywaterman.com

Dance Classes for Children & Adults - St Stephen's & St Julian's Church Halls

Wednesday afternoons at St Stephens's:

Tiny Tots Ballet	ages 3 & 4	3.40 – 4.10pm
Tots Ballet	ages 4 & 5	4.15 – 4.45pm
Junior Ballet	ages 5 – 8	4.50 – 5.20pm
Disco/Jazz	ages 5 – 8	5.25 – 5.55pm

Monday afternoons at St Julian's:

Tiny Tots Ballet	ages 3 & 4	3.40 – 4.10pm
Tots Ballet	ages 5 - 6	4.15 – 4.45pm

Monday evenings at St Julian's:

Adult Beginners Tap	7.00 – 8.00pm
Adult Intermediate Tap	8.00 – 9.00pm

Friday mornings at St Julian's:

Baby Ballet	ages 2 & 3	9.40 – 10.20am
Tiny Tots Ballet	ages 3 & 4	10.30 – 11.10am
Baby Ballet	ages 2 & 3	11.20 – 12.00pm

Please call to book a trial class: 01727 858632

Children's and Adult Classes also held in other areas of St Albans, Redbourn, Harpenden, Shenley & Bricket Wood