

SOPWELL

RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION

making Sopwell a better place

Now you see them soon you won't.....
A view of the disappearing gasholders



In fact, by the time this newsletter is published St Albans' landmark gasholders may well be a thing of the past! Did you know that they were numbered 61 and 62 – numbers given to them by the then gas board when they were built at the time of the old gasworks construction?

On a dry Monday morning in mid

February, four members of the Sopwell Residents Association committee, including Chairman Rick and Secretary Sandy, were given a guided tour of the National Grid's (NG) site. We were accompanied by the visit organisers, Nicola Beech of NG and Alex Walden of JBP, the public relations company acting for NG. We were ably hosted by Alan, the Site Manager for Brown & Mason, demolition contractors working for NG.

We were invited into the site meeting room where we were plied with coffee and biscuits whilst Alan gave us a fascinating in-depth induction on site safety and an explanation on how such a project was managed, including the need for neighbourhood consideration and keeping an environmentally friendly site. He explained how the demolition contractors worked from the top down, removing panels section by section, layer by layer.

We were then issued with Hi-Viz jackets, hard hats, builders' boots, goggles and gloves and then taken out on to the site to see the work actually in progress. The smaller gasholder was already half demolished and we were able to watch two men, toggled out from head to toe in protective clothing, at the top of the remaining half, cutting through with oxyacetylene cutters. Sparks were flying but we were kept at a safe distance. We watched removed sections being cut into neat AO size pieces of metal, piled up and ready for the giant crane -operated magnet to lift them on to the daily lorry to be taken away for recycling.

Work has already started on the larger gasholder, in that part of the 'lid' has been cut away and some holes cut into the side and it is anticipated that, if all goes to plan, the demolition work should be completed by the end of April and then the site will be cleared probably for retail use.

The end of an era!

Jennifer Taylor
Committee Member



From Your Editor

Welcome to our 25th edition of the Sopwell Newsletter. Well, that was a winter and a half. Thank goodness for warm socks and wellington boots. Hopefully, we will now start to enjoy some more pleasant weather. I have been very pleased to see that some of our roads are in the process of being re surfaced—at long last. The More Memories website is in its beta stage and will shortly be available for you all and on that note, there will be a display about the MMOS project, in the City Museum, throughout the month of August. Well worth a visit. I hope you all enjoy our latest edition of the newsletter.

Barry Bateman—Editor

Important date for your diary

SRA Annual General Meeting, 21st May, 7.30pm, at St. Julian's Church, with special guest speaker (T.B.A)

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Sopwell Floods



Floods of almost Biblical proportions hit Sopwell during the last few months and what an effect it has had on our treasured landscape. The area by the Nunnery, as can be seen by the photo, had accumulated a small lake. A scene I haven't seen for a good few years. In the late Eighties and early Nineties this area was often in flood. I was told that it was because there use to be fish ponds for the Nunnery in that area. Whether or not it is true, it is still a nice story. The boardwalk and willow tunnel have had their fair share of water. In fact, a few of us were hoping to have some willow tying training sessions earlier this month but due to the flooding, that has been postponed until the water has subsided.

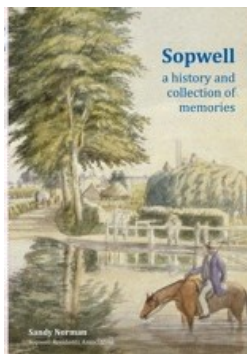
Editor

Green Space Grant

By the time you read this, there may be a new path by the river, in the Nunnery open space. The SRA has obtained (yet) another grant for paving work. This time the money will go towards paying for a crushed concrete path from Cottonmill Lane to meet the existing path which starts near the boardwalk. This should keep our feet dry in wet and muddy conditions. Also there will be provision for access by wheelchairs and pushchairs as a ramp will be constructed. Please let us know if you like it and if it has made your life easier.

Sandy Norman

More Memories Update



Since the launch of the Project last May, a team of us have been extremely busy amassing memories for the Sopwell Memories website. This is a list of some of our activities: Written monthly blog –

blog.sopwellmemories.org.uk

Interviewed 23 more people still ongoing

Transcribed these interviews

Edited extracts from interviews

Attended two workshops at University of Herts and a conference in Bristol

Appointed website designer

Collected many more images and maps

Talked to many women's groups, organisations and history societies about the project

Uploaded 90 posts on to the website

Showcased the project at the St Albans Festive market last December

Helping pupils of St Peter's school in local history project this term

The website complements our book on Sopwell: *Sopwell, a history and collection of memories*, and should be available for you all to search sometime soon. It will certainly be ready by August as we are hiring a room for the month of August in St Albans Museum for the end of project display and celebration. We are hoping that many of you will come along to see what we have been up to.

In addition we are preparing five walk leaflets for the Sopwell area. These will be ready by August as well. I think you will agree we are doing well!

Sandy Norman

The Willow Tunnel under water



The 'true' story of the Cedar Tree

We have always been proud of the Cedar of Lebanon tree situated in St Stephen's field behind the church. It was rumoured to have been where Henry VIII and Ann Boleyn did their courting. We hugged it as part of the Ancient Tree Hunt in 2008 where we estimated it was over 500 years old – not really that old enough to fit the rumour but what the hell. Last year I discovered that one of the vicars of St Stephen's wanted to see if it really was the oldest Cedar of Lebanon in England so he took measurements and sent a letter in 1925 to Kew Gardens. They confirmed that it could be. I wanted to know if it still held this position so I too wrote to Kew but was referred to the Tree Register. I received a letter back from them saying it was extremely unlikely to be that old but he would like to come and see it. It might even be the largest in Hertfordshire. So late in January a few of us met with David Alderman of the Tree Register underneath the tree.

Well it was a mixture of good and bad news. It is not as old as we think. It's a mere

250 or so years old in his estimation. Cedars of this type are very fast growing so that is why we thought it was a lot older. Apparently, when cedars first came to Britain in the 17th century, they were not that hardy and were all wiped out by 1743 when there was a



terrific storm. People planted a hardier species after that and ours is one of them. David described it as a cluster tree, multi-stemmed, and so it looks big with all the branches off the several trunks, a bit like a hedge. On the other hand he said it was a fine specimen: a *champion category 3 tree* no less! It is big in volume and David described it as classic. He was pleased with its condition: there was only one branch which looked damaged and this had a hole in it which was likely to have been made by a woodpecker.

So for the record, the measurements of the St Stephen's cedar are: height: 19m, girth: 8.3m at 0.4m, crown spread west-east 30.8m and crown spread north-south 29.4m. David dated it as being planted c1750 but we shouldn't be too disappointed as it was still a very fine specimen and, out of 2,000 they have recorded, it is in the Top 50 for Britain. Regarding its status as the largest cedar in Hertfordshire, this is all dependent upon whether a tree survives at Beechwood Park School, Markyate. Until this is confirmed our tree at our slightly reduced girth of 8.3m at 0.4m is second largest. It is still something to be proud of.

Regarding the Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn story, David said that this may have started by the Victorians who liked to exaggerate rumours. However, quite often trees were planted to commemorate an event so it could have been planted because of the visit by the pair of them to St Stephens. Or, it could just have been planted to replace one of the less hardy cedars – the dates are right. We will never know the true story, but the pair of them were around our area and they may well have done some canoodling under a tree in the vicinity. Henry used to hunt there and Anne was known to have visited Sopwell Nunnery.

Sandy Norman

Sopwell Memories project

Tai Chi Classes at St. Julian's



Tai Chi Class

The class will continue with support from St Albans council - at a subsidised rate of £3 per session - 11:45 to 12:45 Mondays on the following dates

10 March
17 March
24 March
31 March
7 April
14 April
12 May
19 May
2 June

For more information and to book
Contact Teri Smith at REFIT
01727 819528

teri-smith@leisureconnection.co.uk
Or

Sally Golding, Tai Chi Tutor
01727 837697 or 07954 433893
Sally.golding@ntlworld.com

Sally is hoping to continue the class after 2 June if there is sufficient continued interest and numbers.

St Barts Baby & Toddler Group

St Barts Baby & Toddler Group is a friendly and welcoming play group for babies / toddlers, suitable up to school age. Sessions run every week on Tuesday mornings from 9.15am until 11.15am (term-time only), is based in St Barts Church Hall (Vesta Avenue). It costs only £1.50 per child. Brilliant value for 2 hours entertainment of your little ones, including a snack & drink, with hot drinks available for parents & carers! Everyone is invited to come down and join us for a chat and a cuppa.

The Big Lunch

The Big Lunch on Sunday 1 June is the UK's annual get-together for neighbours, an idea from the Eden Project made possible by the Big Lottery Fund.

The County Council will waive the fee for applying for a street party licence and the associated road closures (providing it is not a major road affecting bus routes). Anyone keen to organise a street party can find out more and apply via www.hertsdirect.org/streetparties

Residents are asked to provide at least four weeks' notice.

Taken from St. Albans News and Views

Recycling

One of our friends from Sopwell, has noticed that since the new rules concerning what goes into which bin, the contractors are not always collecting the recycled items, especially green bin waste. Is this an issue for you? We would love to hear your views.

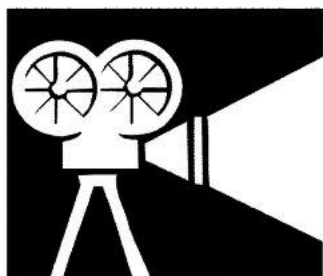
Contact us via our email address info@sopwell.org.uk

Transition Streets

Transition Streets is a way to bring neighbours together to cut their household bills and their carbon footprint through taking practical action. It's free to join and a great way to turn neighbours into friends.

www.transitionstalbans.org

Riverside Streets Community Film Club



Riverside Streets Community Film, a not-for-profit community group is working with St Albans Friends of the Earth to show 'More Than Honey', a beautiful documentary using macro-photography on Saturday 12th April at 7.30pm. There will also be a short talk to introduce FoE's Bee Cause campaign to help stop the decline in the bee population.

The director's intention with this beautiful documentary film exploring the world of honey bees using macro photography is 'to allow the spectator to understand the drama at play and highlight the pressures of the global economy on these small insects'.

The films, open to everyone, are screened in the community room at St Albans Sub Aqua Club Cottonmill Lane with informal café style tables and chairs. The audience have the benefit of the licensed bar in the club and lighter refreshments. There is limited seating of 40 places, and advanced booking is recommended.

On May 3rd they are joining with St Albans Film Festival to show 'Trashed' a film about global waste, narrated by Jeremy Irons - Booking through the festival website.

Sat 12 April - More Than Honey - £5/3 conc Advanced booking

www.bookwhen.com/riverside-film

Sat 3 May - Trashed - £6 Advanced booking through St Albans Film Festival

Gail Jackson

Situations Vacant

Your association is run by a dedicated group of volunteers. Volunteers come and go so we need to keep asking for help otherwise we will fold. With all the good things we are doing this would be a real shame. Working for your community is rewarding: you meet lots of interesting people and you can have an input into local issues. We work closely with the councillors, council and schools to make Sopwell a better place to live. If you feel you can give a little time to help us, please email info@sopwell.org.uk

Next Edition

The next edition will be out in the Autumn 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.

If you live in Sopwell, you are automatically a member of SRA.

There is no charge to join and events are free.

Useful Contacts

Councillor Eileen Harris: 831611:

eileenharris555@btinternet.com

Councillor David Poor: 833670:

david.poor@btinternet.com

Councillor Janet Smith: 763907:

cllr.j.smith@stalbans.gov.uk

County Councillor Sandy Walkington: 07802 177317

sandywalkington@btinternet.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

Sopwell Residents Association:

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