



'Recalled to Life'

Listening to Ian Fulton's moving farewell to The Harpenden Society Annual General Meeting on 29 March – it is his intention to yield up the Presidency during the coming year – one was reminded of the well-known sub-title of the opening section of Charles Dickens' A Tale of Two Cities – 'Recalled to Life.'

He spoke movingly of his delight in the revival of The Society. 'There had been a time when I thought The Society might have to close down', he said, 'I am pleased to report that I shall be handing over to my successor a vibrant and enthusiastic committee and The Society is now revived and flourishing.'

Vice-chairman Richard Thomas thanked Ian Fulton, in well-chosen and well-deserved words, as a man who had given fifty years of illustrious service to the town, beginning as the youngest ever councillor on the old Urban District Council and forty years ago founding the initial Town Council and becoming Harpenden's first mayor. Richard Thomas also made presentations to two extremely hard-working retiring committee members, Rosemary Horne and Keith Nash.



Chairman, Chris Marsden, (above) described how the committee, refreshed with welcome recruits, had structured its activities through the deployment of seven 'working groups'. Whilst much of the year had been spent in analysis and discussion of many issues, some of them new to The Society, the coming year promised to see practical progress made in several areas...of which more on another page. The tone and thrust of the Chairman's report epitomised the bright spirit that so delighted the President.



VALEDICTORY ----Ian Fulton's letter to all members

As some of you already know I am standing down as President of The Society after twenty years and in effect coming to the end of half a century during which Harpenden has allowed me to serve the town in various ways including the Urban District Council, the City and District Council and until now The Society. I have been fortunate and privileged. Small town living can be easy to mock and deride – 'pure parish pump' may deserve this – but affection for and pride in a good home setting is a secure base and guide-line for a fulfilling life in the wider world – and in that sphere an active and positive civic society can play a leading part.

Over the years there have been fluctuations in our fortunes but now in 2012 I am delighted to hand over to my successor a Society which is thriving. This is in no small part due to all the hard work of the committee members and chairmen with whom I have worked since 1992, all of whom have given of their time and skills for the well-being of The Society. What now is a real cause for celebration is that there is in place a committee and officers who are full of energy and vision which bids fair to ensure that The Society fulfils its functions and can head with confidence towards its centenary.

Despite the difficult times in which we live I am optimistic about civic and national life. Adversity can bring out the best in people and in the Diamond Jubilee year the atmosphere feels good and for simple and not for grandiose reasons the Queen's crown has never been more brilliant. Again in the year, to use an Olympic metaphor, we of the old guard in The Society can hand on the torch with confidence and every good wish – Floreat!
Ian Fulton

We owe Ian Fulton the profoundest of gratitude. Let us simply say of him, as Tennyson wrote of his close friend A.H.Hallam, **And thus he bore without abuse
The grand old name of gentleman.**

The Harpenden in Question

being a series of editorial commentaries on important Harpenden issues that should challenge thought and encourage inquiry and action.

5. Education...Location



School location

The 'where' of a school is almost as important as the 'what'. Children should be able to walk to school. It is healthier than being dragged from bed to undertake a bus, train or car journey. It is a sheer waste of time at both ends of the day and the congestion of 'the school run' costs the national economy over £2bn annually. Matching children's involvement with school and neighbourhood activity is achievable as is parents involvement in the work and life of the school; the camaraderie of parents at the primary school gate is an example of this.

Walking to your nearest school

There is much talk of 'parental choice', even with limited school places, but the right to walk to one's nearest school could be endorsed as a target. Unfortunately this is not possible thanks to the geographic pattern of Harpenden's schools but what does help is their good quality. A major reason for this is the home backgrounds of the pupils. The latest research suggests that schools with 35/37% of pupils who are reasonably well-motivated or at least compliant, is sufficient peer-group weighting to guarantee reasonable stability for the learning process.

All Harpenden schools easily comply with this and with many educationally motivated parents the schools deliver a self-filling prophecy of huge proportions.

On behalf of the town's children, I would mildly ask parents to relax a little. I have heard, over some 60 years, so many parents aver that 'our Jason needs pushing' that I began to wonder whether we were dealing with lawnmowers, not children.

Educational systems v educational service

That said, if we argue that children should be able to walk to their nearest school, we should expect them to find the education there that they require. I am very suspicious of schools that claim to offer this one approach or that specific set of values. It smacks of narrowness. While believing that 'choice of school' is part-myth, I am a strong proponent of 'choice within schools'. **The difference between an educational system and an educational service is the former tries to press children into the one conformist mould and the other asks how may we help these children to develop their best selves.**

For more than a hundred years the educational consensus of school, local and central government, had held good. In the last 30 years state control has

massively increased regulation and curriculum audits with more centralised financial funding and control. The crop of academies and free schools, funded directly by the state, is further testimony to this tendency. Local influence has been, perhaps irremediably, weakened, making it difficult to plan sensibly on a neighbourhood basis.

In 1894 the doughty rate-payers of Harpenden elected, under the terms of the seminal 1870 Education Act, their own School Board to ensure there was sufficient school provision in the township. At a recent Harpenden Society meeting, I took this as a good omen to suggest that we might seek a 21st century equivalent. We understand that there is a schools consortium and an informal gathering of school governors; we know that our councillors strive to ensure Harpenden schooling is of top quality and that as many families as possible are well served; there is a thriving Harpenden Parents Group, seeking for improved forecasting of need and earlier settlement of placements; there is the Town Council, not least with its splendid commitment to a Youth Town Council.

Guaranteeing Quality Schools for all

There is much to be said for creating a voluntary body devoted to guaranteeing Harpenden's high-class community schools service. Called **The Harpenden Schools Forum?** Parents, children, teachers and, these days, social enterprises and companies engaged in school organisation are all transient.

What is permanent is the community – and its priceless community assets, the schools.

Eric Midwinter

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Memos for Members-from and for

Memos from members

There was a stoutly positive timbre to the postman's knock this time. One reader was pleased to tell us that the **Harpenden Society News** was *'just the right length and has enough smiles to keep one going through the serious bits...I entirely agree about parliamentary boundaries and the artificial link with Hitchin and it would be interesting to know if anyone in Harpenden would disagree'*.

Many thanks; that also brought a smile to the editor's face – but there is at least one who disagrees in the person of the courteous reader who said *'I have some sympathy with your concern over our parliamentary constituency being grouped with Hitchin but the arrangement does seem to work. However, I totally reject the notion of ten MPs elected for Hertfordshire and allocated to specific areas. Perhaps the most successful part of our present system is the close association between the MP and his constituents and bulk elections would destroy this...I have no idea who is/are my MEPs.'* In turn, I have some sympathy with that but the hope is that the allocation would be of a relevant choice of a successful candidate who had devoted his/her attention to a particular part of Herts, in this case St Albans and Harpenden.



A third reader found the last edition *'most interesting on several fronts. I found the article 'High Hopes for the High Street' extremely heartening...many people in Harpenden would be delighted to see the Red House thriving again...the article 'Age is an Opportunity' giving a very positive perspective on increasing age...Many thanks to you and all the other new officers for the difference you are making in revitalising the Harpenden Society and thereby benefiting us all. It is much appreciated. Keep up the good work'*.

How very generous – your plaudits are really welcome.

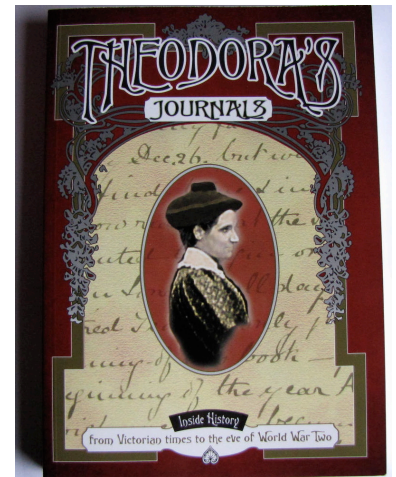
So. Onwards and Upwards.

Memos for members

THEODORA'S JOURNALS

Members will be interested in Theodora's Journals, the writings of Theodora Wilson from the 1880s to the 1930s, published by our friends in the Harpenden and District Local Historical Society. A resident of the town, her journals have been attractively edited and presented by Amy Coburn and Ruth Nason and this fascinating account is obtainable from R.Nason (for HDLHS) 3 Hall Close, Empingham, Rutland LE15 8PE, price £15.00 plus £3.00 p&p.

Be encouraged by the news that retiring President Ian Fulton was presented with a copy at the Society's AGM by Richard Thomas – just as he had been thinking of making a purchase himself.



Top distributor wanted

We are appealing for a volunteer to help organise the distribution of the Harpenden Society News. We require someone to update and maintain the computerised membership lists, prepare and print off the 36 individual sheets of names and addresses, ready for a small team to bundle up each edition ready for our dedicated team of distributors to do the deliveries.

This happens four times a year and it takes about a day to perform the task each time – that's once every 91 and a bit days, so it's not too onerous. If you are able to help, please contact our devoted Membership Secretary Barbara Ouston, as per the next item...

Making contact

....for lots of members need to contact Barbara Ouston for all kinds of queries about membership, subscriptions and so on.

Make a note of: Telephone (01582) 760625

Email. membership@harpendensociety.com

Address. 9 Aplins Close, Harpenden. AL5 2PZ

Website www.harpendensociety.com

Could anyone make themselves more available than that

Winter Wonderings

Planning for the future

Anthony Steele, Convenor of the Built Environment Working Group, writes

*"The purpose of this meeting on 26 January was to make local residents aware of the impending changes in the planning system and how they may affect us in Harpenden. The panel of speakers included **Laurie Atkinson** who has extensive experience of planning situations, **David Rankin** from the Harpenden Green Belt Association and Town Councillor **David Williams** (below) who chairs the Town Council's Policy and Finance Committee.*



David Rankin gave us an overview of the planning situation over the last 10 years. He was followed by David Williams who gave us details of the Town Council's work in preparing for the changes that will result from the new planning legislation. In particular he described the process for developing the new Core Strategy and the possibility of having a Neighbourhood Plan. The whole process is likely to be clearer when the Government's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is published in March.

Key issues

Points that emerged from a wide-ranging question and answer session included:-

Although our current planning policies are based on a 1994 document, they have served us well and do not need much change. It was agreed that growth should be minimised, the Green Belt must be preserved intact and that infrastructure was a considerable constraint on further development. We should not be totally negative, and a number of sites were identified where building new homes was possible.

There was the opportunity and a requirement for consultation on future policies; that all should be vigilant to ensure that changes were acceptable and help to preserve the town's character. Everyone was encouraged to take part in any consultations and to become involved by joining the Town Council's Issue Response system."

Please contact

<https://www.harpenden.gov.uk/issue-response>

There's a place for us--perhaps

Richard Thomas, Joint Convenor Education and Leisure Working Group, writes

"In spring there is a sparkle in the air and birds begin to sing. Herts Highways celebrated by resurfacing Leyton Road outside Park Hall on 23 February making access and parking difficult for The Society's public meeting on Harpenden schools. The hall was filled and the lively debate showed the concern of residents about the shortage of school places in the town. It affects children, parents, would-be parents and grandparents – that's most of us!

The speakers panel comprised noted educationalist **Dr Eric Midwinter** and **David Beer** and **Ben Bardsley** of the recently formed Harpenden Parents Group. **Eric Midwinter** spoke first on the importance of community schools to a community like Harpenden where its size and compactness should enable all our children to go to a school near their homes and walk there.

David Beer of the Harpenden Parents Group then described what had led concerned parents to set the group up in 2011 - a shortage of primary school places meant that 30% of eldest children did not get any of their preferred schools on allocation day. Many learning where they would go only at the last minute. This shortage is likely to continue, and the emergency measures that the County implemented in 2011 cannot be repeated indefinitely.

David's colleague **Ben Bardsley** spoke about shortages in secondary school places. While our primary schools cater only for Harpenden children, our secondary schools must be open to children from Redbourn, Wheathampstead and Kimpton. Thus extending the problem as primary schoolchildren move up to a local secondary school.

Primary and secondary school places has not grown in step with the rise in the local birth rate, the numbers of children moving into the town and a rise in the number of dwellings. The arrival of a Free School in the town may not help if the places are filled by children from elsewhere and anyway it is not planned to be a secondary school. Ben said the town needs a new secondary school now.

A lively debate that followed included parents, school governors and concerned residents. Before closing the meeting **Chris Marsden** recommended that the Society should try to convene a follow up meeting with the County so that we can all better understand the difficulties facing them in providing school places for our children and what can be done.

Chris Marsden urged everyone interested to look at the website of the Harpenden Parents Group at www.harpendenparentsgroup.co.uk.

Taken Litter-Ally

Committee member Alan Jackson advises on DIY litter disposal

Except in medieval Cordoba, people worldwide discarded their – mainly biodegradable – materials at random without punishment until the end of the 19th century.. Litter louts - and the main culprits are males under 30 - are said to have no sense of personal ownership of the areas they despoil but for those in Harpenden who do have that sense of ownership and wish to do something about it, help is at hand.

The man to contact is Luke Bennett (01727 819589) in the Waste Management Department of St Albans City and District Council.

If you know of a litter-strewn road, call him and he will arrange for it to be cleared. If you are prepared to do-it-yourself, either dump the rubbish in your own waste bin or a street litter-bin or phone Luke to arrange for the SADC's contractors to collect it.. WasteAware, who run the County Council's Dark Lane recycling centre, say you can only take your own household waste there and not other people's. So that's not an option.



You could organise your own litter pick by contacting Luke Bennett, who can provide litter pickers, bags and gloves and arrange collections. SADC may possibly organise a litter pick in Harpenden this year but the only litter picks organised by Harpenden Town Council are during the 'volunteer' days on the Common.



Do the happy volunteers sing 'The Wombles of Harpenden Common are we'? There's only one way to find out....



Above and below. Although the town centre is kept relatively litter free by our street cleaning services, the litter louts are still out and about on the lanes and waysides of Harpenden.



The Way Ahead

David Niven trained and commanded the platoon of varied conscripts in the 1944 morale-booster film *The Way Ahead* pulling them together and preparing them for the vicissitudes of warfare. Seventy years on and The Harpenden Society committee, complete with a pleasing sprinkling of fresh recruits and under the ebullient leadership of **Chris Marsden**, has undergone a year of scrutiny and debate out of which has emerged a series of likely actions and feasible policies for the coming year, several of them alluded to at the recent Annual General Meeting of The Society.

Already a couple of strategic 'workshop' meetings – relatively small groups of movers and shakers resolved to find answers and make progress – are being convened by the Society. One of them concerns the future of the Harpenden Memorial Hospital, our proposal for which was described in the last edition, while the other is about the knotty issue of school places, covered liberally in this edition.

Another wider range of issues has appealed to **Chris Marsden** and touches on his specialist skills. This is the significant arena of the whole economic and cultural viability of the town centre and its adjacent retail foci in Southdown and Batford. This indicates a healthy urgency, shared with the Town Council, to ensure that these vital hubs of town life are energised and modernised.

Some weeks ago **Chris Marsden** undertook a pilot sampling of Harpenden shops and businesses in respect of the corporate responsibility and found that many make an often unheralded contribution to the local community. The results of this fascinating survey are to be found on the Society's website.

Harpenden Society News can reveal that this pioneer initiative has attracted the attention of the Policy Unit of 10 Downing Street. The government is launching a scheme aimed at recognising the communal value of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs, those with less than 250 employees). **Chris Marsden** has been asked to nominate certain Harpenden shops and businesses that could be involved in the proposed 'Trading for Good' or 'T4G' qualification.

Moreover, there is a strong likelihood that The Society will be a major player in the running of the 'Town Team', a project already successfully tried in other districts, whereby an intrepid and self-resourced band of amateurs, led by the 'Town Manager' and acting outside the normal brief of the

Town Council will endeavour to extend and regenerate the trading and leisure attractions of the town. This aim to increase the vibrancy of economic and social life has already generated some straws in the wind, ranging from more effective use of the 'town square' in the Church Green area and more numerous and more exciting markets to a refurbished Public Hall, a modernised Rothamsted Park and more imaginative provision for teenagers.



As well as his constructive meetings with the Mayor and others, the Chairman has also met with the local MP, **Peter Lilley**, chiefly to convey to him The Society's critical views on the proposed expansion of capacity at Luton Airport. **Peter Lilley** was also interested to hear of, and expressed his willingness to assist, with such matters as the challenge of making the town centre more welcoming, the 'Red House' proposal, plans for the Batford Industrial Estate, the need for improvements at Rothamsted Park and the call for better provision for the town's youth, all issues with which The Society is becoming more and more concerned in both senses of the word.



The movie *The Way Ahead* famously finished, as the hardened platoon moved doggedly into action, with 'The Beginning', where commonly films close with 'The End'. That is the Society's current position. In **Chris Marsden's** words, ***'last year I said we would ask – and then act. We have asked – and now the Society is at the beginning of a busy and, I trust, effective phase of activity.'***

Photos courtesy of Harpendia.com