

The Newsletter of

HARLOW CIVIC SOCIETY

Spring 2017

Ron Bill: 1932-2017

Ron Bill, a founder-member of Harlow Civic Society, community activist and historian of Harlow, died on Tuesday, 18th April, 2017, following a heart operation at Basildon Hospital. Born on 13th June, 1932, Ron grew up in Dagenham and came to Harlow in 1956 to work as a rent collector for Harlow Development Corporation. He afterwards worked for Harlow District Council.

Deeply committed to the concept of a new town, Ron campaigned through the Labour Party and other organisations for the Playhouse, Harlow Museum, the Leah Manning Centre and other amenities. He wrote A Civic History of Harlow 1955-85, Armorial Bearings in Harlow, and Coming to Harlow: the Rentman Cometh. He also wrote Growing up in Dagenham, wrote the introduction to Jim Priest's second volume of Growing up in Harlow, and with Stan Newens co-authored Leah Manning – the life of Harlow's Labour MP 1945-50. He served on the community project team that commemorated Harlow men killed in the First World War.



Ron is survived by his wife, Alice, daughters Jackie and Rosemary, son Rodney, and three grandsons.

Members of Harlow Civic Society will remember him with affection and gratitude.

Stan Newens

Spurriers

Harlow is celebrating its 70th year as a new town. It soon became clear to Gibberd and his team that the land allocated to become Harlow New Town had topographical features that lent themselves to different types of leisure usage. Thus, some land being relatively flat was considered suitable for playing fields and other undulating areas were more appropriate for a golf course and a town park. In particular, the land around the small hamlet of Netteswell Cross was deemed particularly interesting in terms of terrain and features such as the existing housing, the Greyhound Public House, a spring-fed stream used for the cultivation of water-cress and a fine house and grounds. So it was that Spurriers House was chosen to be the central feature of what was to be Harlow Town Park.

From the beginning the park was conceived as one without a hard boundary, accessible to all at all times. This concept ensured that it was different from the conventional municipal park, and all the better for it. However, not all convention was dispensed with. The formality of flower beds— especially roses – was continued in the area in front of the bandstand and elsewhere, as was the practice of growing bedding plants for display across the town. A nursery facility was established at Spurriers in the walled garden area adjacent to what became Pets' Corner. Eventually a new larger nursery was built on Gilden Way.

Harlow Town Park is, this year, celebrating its 60th birthday. Much has changed in these six decades. In the early days it required a considerable army of gardeners to maintain it. Now, most of the work is undertaken by volunteers, in an environment that has been designed to be easier to maintain with the guidance of professional management.

The acquisition of Spurriers House had presented the development corporation with an opportunity, of which Sylvia Crowe, the eminent landscape architect, took full advantage. She had been hired by Frederick Gibberd to oversee the landscaping of the new town. The town park is probably the crowning glory in her work here, and she is commemorated by a Harlow Civic Society blue plaque attached to Spurriers House. The house gave a point of focus for the development of Pets' Corner as well as the cafe, skate park and formal garden. Pets' Corner has recently celebrated its 50th anniversary, and has proved to be the most popular attraction in the park.



The ravages of time and a much reduced budget have not been kind to our park. It became run-down and clearly in need of a serious makeover, but how could this be achieved? Harlow Council sought designs for a complete overhaul of the park, but all submissions were rejected as being too radical and expensive. Eventually the Council decided to apply for a Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) grant. The Heritage Lottery said that a bid would only be considered if the proposal centred on the unique qualities of our park (they *are* the Heritage Lottery Fund). HLF were then very helpful in guiding officers and consultants in the preparation of the bid. The subsequent scheme was approved in October 2014 for refurbishment plus the addition of some new buildings. Work has just about finished, so that now:

Pets' Corner

has a new entrance; a shop; a new barn for undercover outdoor events; new office and staff accommodation and a new, state of the art, Learning Centre in the form of a building made from straw bales.



Spurriers House has a commercially-run cafe on the ground floor and two refurbished flats to let on the first floor. The building has been repaired and external buildings, such as the toilet block, have been demolished.

The Bandstand has had a complete makeover and looks great. The pond in front of it has been decked over.



The Walled Garden is now being developed as a nursery area again, and is being used as a training ground for park volunteers.

The Park has had a major refurbishment. The Water Garden was the major beneficiary and has been completely rebuilt in its original form. New footpaths have been built and old ones restored. Many new public seats and litter bins have been installed. A continuing programme of planting and plant maintenance is assured for at least five years in the HLF programme. Green Flag status has been achieved, which is a feather in the cap of all involved. Sixty years on from the inauguration of Harlow Town Park I think that it is fair to say that the park has benefited greatly from its £1.8M makeover and is in good shape, thus ensuring that the people of Harlow will be able to enjoy it for decades to come.

John Curry

Junction 7a: our reply

Harlow Civic Society sent Essex County Council a detailed list of objections to the proposed (and now adopted) M11 Junction 7a plan. Although the development plan has been adopted, and was approved by Harlow District Council (changes to Gilden Way are already under construction) we think our members would like to know our grounds for rejection. Briefly, these are as follows:

1. Safety: Highways England has objected to the location because of its proximity to the existing junction. The necessary traffic- interweaving and lane-changing at motorway junctions creates disruption which is exacerbated when junctions are close together, making accidents more likely.
2. The use of Gilden Way as the link road will lead to a great increase in traffic, including heavy goods vehicles in Old Harlow and along First Avenue, causing even more congestion throughout the town and increasing pollution.
3. Essex County Council is planning to encroach on Green Belt land. Local government should seek to protect the Green Belt in the interests of the environment, restricting urban sprawl and improving living standards.
4. Government approval of Harlow North/Gilston Park renders the Junction 7a 'solution' to the traffic problem obsolete. There will be 20 to 30 thousand new houses in the 'Garden City', and the alternative northern route and junction are essential to the new situation.

For these reasons the Civic Society opposes ECC plans and urges them to revise and update the Junction 7a scheme instead of burdening us with a costly, noisy, destructive and disruptive albatross.

Barbara Burge

The Day the Music Died: the Square

The Square held its final gig on 28th January, a night of great emotion which created a last memory of this amazing musical phenomenon. A week or so later Richard Holgarth of the Square management team went along to the boarded-up site to find it vandalised. The Fire Brigade contacted the developers, who made it safe. The Angle building, also boarded-up, shares the wait for demolition. The great climax of January 28th is now an anticlimax. Derelict buildings on a muddy site.



The sad story leading up to this will be familiar to many Civic Society members. Circle Housing's development plan was rejected by the Council nearly two years ago. Then the developers won the appeal. The understanding had been that they, Circle Housing, would help the Square financially in finding new premises, but they denied this, saying that there was already alternative music provision in Harlow. The Square asked the Council to appeal the decision in the High Court, but the Council refused. It would have cost £8000 to start this process.

At no time has the Square asked the Council for funding. They have always been financially in the black. The Council themselves suggested the sum of £150,000, and at various times, with various possible venues, including the Playhouse, other sums were mentioned. Negotiations continued. All premises would have cost a great deal to convert. So, between the cynical renegeing from responsibility shown by Circle Housing, and the failure of Harlow Council to follow through the Planning Appeal, the Square ceased to be. The management recognises that Council funding has been squeezed for the past several years and there is little spare cash for this kind of project. The Council continually asked the Square for Business Plans, which were always submitted, but with no result.

Recently, Civic Society officers met John Clempner and other leading councillors for a discussion on various matters at issue in the town, as they have done regularly. When asked about the Square John Clempner said talks could resume. But he then added that in any case the Council could not afford the cost of keeping the Square open, so nothing would result. No one asked them to bear the cost of keeping the Square open.

Barbara Burge.

Harlow Architectural Design Awards

This competition is intended to celebrate the very best in local building design, and encourage a higher standard of architecture for future developments in Harlow.

Organised by the **Harlow Civic Society** and sponsored by **Places for People** and **Architecture & Design Services**, the Harlow Architectural Design Awards are split into two categories – to recognise the best in Residential and Non-Residential building in the town.

Nominations for the 2017 awards are now open.

To submit your chosen buildings, follow this link:
<http://www.harlowarchitecturaldesignawards.org.uk/nominations/>

Only buildings completed in the year to 30 June 2017 will be eligible. You may nominate buildings in the surrounding villages as well as those in Harlow.

Residential buildings can be houses or flats, one-off homes or a group of dwellings or well-designed extensions to an existing home. Non-residential buildings can include commercial, community or mixed-use buildings.

Both newly built and remodelled and/or extended existing buildings will qualify, especially where the work is an alternative to demolishing a nice structure and starting again. What matters most is the quality of the architecture.

All nominations received by 30th June will be reviewed by our judges, and considered for our awards shortlist. After a public vote, the winner in each category will be decided by our expert panel, and announced in October 2017.

The awards for the first year were presented to the 2016 winners at our AGM in January. As a reminder, the winners were:

Residential: 3-12 & 161-165 Orchard Croft

Non-residential: Pearson's Building, Edinburgh Way

These awards were set-up as an initiative by the Society though a specially-formed team of local people including Paul McLintic (formerly secretary of the Society) and aim to promote high quality architecture that is in sympathy with the original design of the town. For more information, see the awards website at this link: <http://www.harlowarchitecturaldesignawards.org.uk/>

Tony Evans

Matters considered at a recent meeting between the Council CEO and Chair, and members of our committee.

The Playhouse

There has been considerable concern expressed about the future of the Playhouse and its ownership, specifically by community groups who have enjoyed use of the premises: would this sort of use be sustainable were the Playhouse to become privately owned? Some members of the HCS committee who met Malcolm Morley and John Clempner recently wanted assurances that Harlow Council do not intend to sell the Playhouse. However, for financial reasons it is necessary to seek a level of external funding to find ways to manage the Playhouse cost-effectively. Two proposals have been put forward, apparently, but no decision has yet been made. In the meantime the former manager of the Playhouse, Scott Ramsay, has left and his duties are being covered by the existing staff until a new appointment is made.



At the same meeting, HCS members spoke strongly about the state of the site of the former Square, which goes from bad to worse while the developers seem unable to implement plans for proceeding. Furthermore, there has been no movement concerning the failed promise of the developers, Circle Housing, to assist in finding an alternative venue for the Square. Harlow Council appealed to the Planning Inspector, who agreed that this promise had been made but nothing has happened since then and the company blame their change of mind on changes to their estimations of financial return on their purchase. John Clempner said he would be open to new suggestions from Friends of The Square. (See our piece on the last days of the Square on page 4)

Isobel Urquhart

Extras: a round-up of other items of interest

Potholes: the dreadful state of the roads was a big talking point in the run up to the County Council elections. The pockmarked desert at the Gilden Way/Old London Road roundabout was particularly concerning. Now, however, there is a

beautiful new tarmac surface - entirely due to the transformation of Gilden Way being carried out in preparation for the new Junction 7a. I suppose we must be grateful for small mercies, but it seems a high price to pay in view of the felled trees,ruined vegetation on the roundabout, and the seemingly eternal roadworks.

The Old London Road: residents of Church Langley are anxious about the proposed closure of the Old London Road as part of the creation of the new Junction 7a access from Gilden Way. This will probably become a very contentious issue as the time for the permanent closure draws near. We shall report on developments

Burnt Mill Academy and Frederick Gibberd: some Civic Society members are concerned at the proposal to name the projected new Academy after Sir Frederick Gibberd. He was always against having any kind of public memorial in his name. Our members are just as concerned that this plan might go ahead, linking him to an unworthy building. If the architecture is acceptable we will probably not object.

Bhs mural: no change. The mural is still inside the empty building, though the Harvey Centre says it has 'plans' to resite it. Watch this space.

Barbara Burge

Harlow Civic Society is Online

The Civic Society is on Facebook and Twitter.

Please like us on Facebook at:
<https://www.facebook.com/HarlowCivicSociety>

and follow us on Twitter:
<https://www.twitter.com/@HarlowCivicSoc>

We are still working on revamping and updating our web site: The address will be the same as the current out of date one:

<http://www.harlowcivicsociety.org.uk>

Harlow Civic Society Committee

Stan Newens – Chair: 420108
John Curry – Vice-Chair: 425214
Tony Evans – Treasurer: 414015
Isobel Urquhart – Secretary
Barbara Burge – Press: 427244.

All contributions to the Newsletter to Barbara Burge (b_a_burge@yahoo.co.uk)

**Harlow Civic Society welcomes new members. For information about joining contact the Treasurer or email hcs@evanstmd.plus.com
If you are reading the edited version of this on paper, why not send us your email address to get the full version, and help us keep our costs down**