

Caversham Post Office closure, and shopping and services in Caversham: changes and challenges

During November 2018 Caversham residents learned of the proposal to close the current Caversham Post Office: more formally, the Caversham sub-Post Office in Church Street. For a number of years this Post Office has been located in the Day Lewis pharmacy on the north side of the road opposite the St Martin's precinct. Day Lewis are closing their Caversham operation for commercial reasons and the property has been sold for development. At the same time the public has been informed of the proposal to close the 'Crown' Post Office at 21-22, Market Place with the plan to continue their level of service inside the W.H. Smith store premises at 39, Broad Street. Noting, however, that no cash machine will be provided. The new proposal is tantamount to a downgrading of the principal Post Office in the Reading District and thus a matter of serious concern to the public. Because the Market Place office is a 'Crown' office a Local Consultation was inaugurated starting 14th November 2018 and ending on 28th December 2018. Many readers may already be familiar with this and perhaps will have made their views known. To their credit the Post Office has provided a briefing document explaining the reasons for the changes proposed and outlining the methods to make submissions. The briefing document also states in summary the 'Principles of Community Engagement on changes to the Post Office network' which lists three stages of activity: 'Notify; Engage and Consult'. However, this model of public engagement does not appear to apply to a post office counter in a retail premises such as the Day Lewis pharmacy in Caversham Church Street.

Matt Rodda MP for Reading East has been contacted by many residents following the proposals made for both Post Offices and in response convened a public meeting for the evening of Friday 30th November at Caversham Baptist Church. Before the meeting Matt Rodda's office sent *Caversham Bridge* the following statement: "The Caversham Post Office is a lifeline for many local people and I am very concerned about the plans to close it. I am calling for the Post Office to listen to the concerns of local people and to continue to provide a local sub-post office in Caversham town centre."

"I hope that the public meeting will allow residents to have their say and I am planning to send a report of the discussion to the Post Office and to the Government to help explain the strength of feeling in our community."

"I have also had an initial meeting with Kelly Tolhurst MP, the Minister responsible for postal services, and she has offered to look into our concerns about the post office closures in Caversham and

also in Reading town centre, where the Post Office plans to shut the Crown Post Office in the Market Place and to move it into the upstairs of W. H. Smith in Broad Street."

The public meeting was well-attended and this bodes well for keeping the issue alive and in the front of attention. *Caversham Bridge* will continue to report on this issue in subsequent issues.

The end of the year 2018 is a good moment to reflect on some of the issues which have impacted the Caversham community and its geographical neighbours north of the river. The first six months of the year were fully occupied by the campaign organized by 'Concerned of Caversham' to challenge cutbacks to the Caversham bus network provided by Reading Buses. The campaign certainly engaged many in the local community. Some adjustments were made

to the proposals and timetables but off-peak service reductions and services over the weekend have not been restored. Thames Travel made some positive adjustments to their services in the Caversham Heights area, and without the X39/X40 on Sunday residents would be left with five services only across the day on a two hour interval. Many campaigners are disappointed with the intransigence and lack of transparency of Reading Buses service management. The then Head of Service has since left Reading to pursue his career elsewhere. We hope that his successor will have the opportunity to learn from what happened in 2018. CADRA has made a written submission to the 'House of Commons Transport Committee: Health of the Bus Market Inquiry' so some of this local history is 'preserved for the record'.

Caversham continues as a vibrant and varied local community with fully engaged residents who are keen to see amenities and services sustained. We hope therefore that a new 'home' can be found for the 'sub-Post Office'. There have been retail casualties nevertheless: the Centre has lost the

services of the NatWest bank; the motor supply shop has been replaced by a physiotherapy clinic; Suprema the dry cleaners closed; several units in the precinct are vacant, and we are losing one pharmacy. The year has also seen the closure of the Priory Avenue GP surgery. The centre used to have 'a proper newsagent' where Costa Coffee now stands. As always, it is 'swings and roundabouts' and retail variety depends as much on small enterprise as on branches of national brands. We still have Jennings the butchers and a number of café and food concerns which add good notes to day and night life in Caversham. So, let us see what 2019 brings to help keep Caversham 'vibrant, varied and local'.



'Day Lewis pharmacy and Sub-Post Office in Church Street'

A Happy and Peaceful New Year to all our Readers

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www.saintbarnabas.org.uk

St Andrew
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www.standrewscaversham.org

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Rev'd H R Gayle Tel: 946 3009

TALKING POINT

by Derek Chandler

A Happy New Year

'Happy New Year'. Our greetings ring out at midnight on 31st December as we sing 'For Auld Lang Syne' and let off fireworks. We may go to a Watchnight Service and thank God for the year that is past and commit ourselves in hope into his hands to guide our future, but however we express it, we might look forward to 2019 with foreboding, or maybe excitement for the new year to come.

There have been joys and sorrows in my life in 2018 as I expect many of you have had, too. We did not quite follow the pattern of the film 'Four weddings and a Funeral'. It was one wedding and thirteen funerals. The one wedding was great fun and eagerly looked forward to. It was our son's, with the girlfriend he had met at Parkrun. At this point, I must recommend Parkrun. It is a good way of keeping fit, but also of meeting a partner, for our daughter was married two years ago to the husband she met at Parkrun!

This brings us to things you can learn from these occasional services not held in a church. The wedding was in a register office, the couple had not wanted to come to church, but they wanted me to give one of the readings. I chose the meaning of true love, with I Corinthians: 4-7 at the back of my mind, from Captain Corelli's Mandolin. I was astounded to receive applause.

The funerals, whether I took them or mostly went to them were mainly in a Crematorium Chapel. They were celebrations of a life, with thanksgiving. Yes, there was sadness, particularly as two of them were close family members, but also food for thought. The people had served their families, but had also served the community, they may not have realised that their lives had reflected what it means to follow Jesus Christ (Matthew: 25 37-40).

There were also two of our Franciscan brothers and sisters. One of the sisters had written a poem, which was based on the phrase in the 'Canticle of the Sun'. She accepted that she would not recover from her illness and was waiting for her kind and gentle sister, waiting to lead her by the hand on the next stage of life's journey as she hushed her latest breath. All of the people believed in the Resurrection and eternal life in some way.

As I close, I can tell you that I had some inspiration from an article in my newspaper telling us that this year more people than ever are going to have a vegan or vegetarian feast. People are resolving to lead healthier lives, eating less meat, more vegetables and exercising. Whatever your New Year's resolutions, whether it be 'Veganuary' or 'dry January', or foregoing the sales-following the principle of Pope Francis' theology of enough - may I wish you a 'Happy New Year!'

Rev'd. Margaret Dimmick PTO curate, based at
Caversham Park Ecumenical Church



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SUNDAY SERVICES

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8.00am Holy Communion - BCP (first, second and fourth Sundays)
Matins - BCP (Third Sunday)
9.30am Holy Communion (second, third and fourth Sundays)
Service of the Word (First Sunday)
6.30pm Holy Communion with Healing Prayers usually 1st Sunday, Evensong (usually Choral on second Sunday)

St John, Gosbrook Road
9.30am Holy Communion (first, third and fourth Sundays)
9.30am All Age Worship (second Sunday)
Fifth Sunday - Parish wide service (check website for details)

St Margaret, Mapledurham
11.15am Holy Communion (first, second and fourth Sundays) Morning Worship (third Sunday)
Fifth Sunday - Parish wide service (check website for details)

St Andrew, Harrogate Road
8.00am The Eucharist
10.00am Parish Eucharist (Sung)
First Sunday, Family Eucharist
11.30am The Eucharist first Sunday BCP

St Barnabas, Grove Road, Emmer Green
8.00am Said Communion (BCP)
9.30am Parish Communion
9.30am COGS for all ages (1st Sunday of Month)

RIVERSIDE CHURCH (READING)
Meeting at Hemdean House School, Hemdean Road, Caversham
10.00am Morning Worship & Teaching

CAVERSHAM PARK ECUMENICAL PARTNERSHIP

Meeting at Caversham Park School
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Morning Worship (2nd and 4th Sundays)
All Age Worship (at Festival Times)

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3.45pm Messy Church - for all the family
Fourth Sunday of the month

GRACE CHURCH, Old Peppard Road
10.30am Worship and Ministry, Children's Church

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ROMAN CATHOLIC

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Saturday 5.30pm,
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Mapledurham House 6.00pm Mass (last Sunday of the month)

St Michael, Sonning Common

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9.00 and 10.30am Monday

SOCIETY OF FRIENDS (Quakers)

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10.30am (House study groups Sept-June Tel: 9475783)

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Church Street, Caversham

9.30am Sunday School
11.00am Divine Worship
6.00pm Evening Service

Caversham Bridge 2019: Copy price and subscription price

Caversham Bridge is sold at £0.40 per copy. The subscription price which includes delivery to your home address is increased to £5.00 / year (for 12 issues) from January 2019.

Caversham Bridge

Contributions for the February 2019 issue should be sent to the Caversham Thameside and Mapledurham Parish Office by Monday 7th January. The date for the March issue is Monday 4th February.

Email address is: editors@cavershambridge.org
Advertising copy for the February 2019 issue should be sent to Mr A. Wright, Twigmoor, Upper Warren Avenue, Caversham by Friday 4th January. The date for the March issue Friday 1st February. Email address is: advertising@cavershambridge.org

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St Barnabas Centre
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A community newspaper produced by Caversham Christian News Ltd on behalf of the Churches of Caversham

EDITORS: Dr Alison Johnston, Mrs Janet Offord, Mr Alan Bradbury, Mr Stephen A Roberts, Mrs Heather Gale.
c/o Church House, 59 Church Street, Caversham. RG4 8AX
Tel: 947 1703. Email: editors@cavershambridge.org

ADVERTISEMENT MANAGER: Mr A Wright,
Tel: 947 6958.
Email: advertising@cavershambridge.org

CIRCULATION MANAGER: Mrs Carol Moloney.
Tel: 947 1370. Email: circulation@cavershambridge.org

COMPANY CHAIRMAN: Mr Colin Ferguson.

COMPANY SECRETARY: Mr Tony Holland.

COMPANY TREASURER: Mrs J Belcher. Tel: 947 4772
Email: treasurer@cavershambridge.org

POSTAL SUBSCRIPTION MANAGER: Mrs D. Moore.
Tel: 947 3713

The Editors wish to make it clear that the views expressed in this newspaper do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the board.

The Editors also would like to bring to readers' notice that the inclusion of advertisements in this paper does not mean an endorsement of the products or of the services offered.

Published by Caversham Christian News Ltd, Church Street, Caversham, Reading RG4 8AX Tel: 0118 947 1703.

Typeset and layout by RP Character Graphics,
Tel: 07949 980 982

Printed by: Mortons Print, Media Centre, Morton Way,
Horncastle, Lincolnshire LN9 6JR

Grit Bins retained for the Winter

All 47 grit bins in Reading will remain in place for the coming winter, following an annual review of winter service provision.

The Council had intended to stop grit bin provision in the Borough during 2018 as part of a package of budget savings agreed earlier in the year. All grit bins will now be retained as a result of the highways team identifying efficiency savings elsewhere in its budget.

Every year Reading Borough Council puts in place a robust Winter Service Plan to help combat the worst effects of extreme weather on the town's road users and residents.

A review takes place annually where the Council looks at the cost of the overall service, the provision of grit bins, and the effectiveness of the Winter Service Plan against the Council's statutory obligations under the Highway Act 1980. A new piece of legislation also came into effect this year called the 'Well Managed Highway Infrastructure: Code of Practice'.

The introduction of new computer software systems in the highways team now makes it easier, quicker and more efficient for inspectors to record defects and order a repair direct to a vehicle

which is carrying out repair work. This reduces time and paperwork and minimises errors.

Efficiency savings brought about by this 'asset management' approach to highway maintenance means the Council has been able to deliver the required efficiency savings to accommodate a reduced budget, while at the same time delivering the necessary highway maintenance programmes. Efficiencies realised this year also include a small saving negotiated by the Council with its winter service contractor.

Councillor Tony Page, Reading Borough Council's Lead Member for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport, said:

"I'm pleased that the Council Highways Team has managed to find the required efficiencies elsewhere, thereby making it possible to retain

all 47 grit bins in Reading this winter. I would also like to emphasise that the efficiency savings have been achieved without a reduction in the agreed highways maintenance programmes by making better use of technology to cut costs and through a saving negotiated with the Council's winter service contractor."

Reading Borough Council's updated Winter Service Plan was brought to a meeting of the Council's Strategic Environment Planning & Transport Committee on 21st November 2018 for review and approval.

Caversham Methodist Church (Gosbrook Road): Toys and Teens Appeal

This year Gosbrook Road Methodist Church supported the 'Toys and Teens Appeal' (on behalf of Reading Family Aid). This was very successful, with gifts donated by Church members and friends. The Babies and Toddler Group donated many baby toys, such as rattles, stacking toys, and posting box type toys

which had been suggested by the charity.

Crawshay Pre-school (which runs from the premises of the Methodist Church) had a Wishing Tree with tags for the parents to select a toy to donate. The parents were very generous and donated many lovely toys for the appeal.

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Camino de Santiago de Compostela: reflections of a pilgrim

It all started at 6.55am on Wednesday 19th September! Following morning prayers at the Statue of St. James Church, our group of 25 'Peregrinos' boarded the coach to Stanstead for our flight to Santiago de Compostela in North West Spain. It was a fine day and our flight was smooth and comfortable. On arrival at Santiago Airport, we boarded the coach to our destination, Lugo, approximately 110km East from Santiago. As we approached Lugo, the coach began to stutter and eventually pulled into a lay-by for the driver to solve his gear problem. Looking up to the left, a magnificent sight was to be seen, the walled City of Lugo, with its spectacular cathedral – which has the Papal privilege of Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, day and night. The driver managed to get the coach on the road again and proceed up the torturous, winding hill to our hostel/hotel in this beautiful city.

We arose from our abodes on a somewhat misty Thursday morning to begin our first days of walking on the 'Primitive Way', down the steep, cobbled hill from the city, looking out for the traditional markers showing the various 'Ways' - a yellow shell, pointing in the direction of travel.

It would take us pilgrims five days walking from Lugo, to Ferreira, to Malide, to Arzua, to O Pedrouzo, before reaching our destination, Santiago, on the fifth day.

During these five days, at each hostel/hotel, Church, café, restaurant, shop we had our 'Pilgrims Passport' stamped with a wide variety of interesting and colourful images – all necessary to obtain a completion certificate (the Compostela Scroll). Those of pilgrims who stopped over-night in the hostels, were extremely pleased with the cleanliness and facilities provided by the various Albergue and at a cost of 10 - 12 euros. Some provided breakfast and meals at additional cost. Those pilgrims in the hotels had a different deal at greater expense!

Having followed the shells, we arrived in Santiago and headed for the fabulous Romanesque/Baroque Cathedral of St. James, topped by the 'Santiago Peregrino'. We stood in awe and wonder in the Plaza del Obradoira to admire the newly refurbished Cathedral frontage, then entered the Cathedral, and offered our prayers of thanksgiving for a successful pilgrimage. In the evening we attended the Pilgrim Mass of Thanksgiving, which concluded with the massive thurible being swung from one end of the Transept to the other, to the amazement and delight of all present.

This is a very brief insight into our Walk, but I'm sure all who took part - not only our group, but ALL peregrinos from all over the world - felt great satisfaction and an emotional high, standing in front of the Cathedral.

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We are a friendly group of people who meet twice monthly and you are very welcome to come along and see what a lipreading class is all about. We meet on the first and third Friday afternoons of each month, starting at 2.00pm and finishing at 3.30pm, with a tea break half way through.

As well as lipreading, there are opportunities to find out about home assessment for your personal needs, learn about the services that are available to you, attend a demonstration of the latest equipment available for personal and home use and to learn tips and strategies that are helpful to anyone with hearing loss. Come along and join us! The group meets at the Abbey Baptist Church, Abbey Square, Reading RG1 3BE which is behind Reading Central Library and a ten minute walk from Reading station.

Contacts: Maureen Dickens (Tel: 0118 926 8055 & Email: maureen_dickens@sky.com); Kay Murray (Tel: 01428 751 234 & Email: david.34murray@btinternet.com); John Chilvers Email: m.chilvers@sky.com

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The Caversham Heights Society

There has been only one meeting of the Caversham Heights Society since the talk about *'The work of Launchpad and the homeless in Reading'* at the beginning of October. This was on Wednesday 17th October when Group Captain Paterson, who had only recently retired from the RAF after 26 years of service, talked about *'100 years of the RAF'*.

Most of the audience were expecting a historical account of the origins of the RAF, the disputes over its uses, its development and the changes and current difficulties facing the service. We were given an account of how the early pioneers, such as the Wright Brothers and Bleriot, showed the potential of flying. We were then told about how the Balloon Corps and the Royal Flying Corps, both formed in 1912, were used for aerial reconnaissance. These were followed by the Royal Naval Air Corps in 1916. Unfortunately at that time neither the Army nor the Royal Navy were interested in air power, largely because in the years leading up to the beginning of the First World War the Government, only too aware of Britain's maritime history and responsibilities, had been too busy concentrating on building up the navy in competition with Germany. It was the far sightedness of Field Marshall Smuts and Winston Churchill, both of whom

saw the potential of air reconnaissance for troops on the ground in identifying where enemy positions were located, that led to the creation of the RAF in 1918 as a fighting force. Indeed it was the combination of the RAF, tanks and other mechanised weapons that speeded up the conclusion of the War. There was little progress in developing the RAF during the 1920s and early 1930s until the threat of Hitler's Luftwaffe made the Government take air power seriously, as we know from the valiant efforts of the Spitfire and Hurricane pilots during the Battle of Britain in 1940. Even so it was not until 1944 that the RAF was technologically up to speed.

Sadly, we were not told about the developments thereafter, except that all three services felt the need to have some form of air power which has meant a certain amount of duplication, and in the current financially straightened times has led to strong disagreements. What we had instead, however, was an interesting and very personal story of how the speaker joined the RAF in 1992, became a helicopter pilot and gradually rose through the ranks by service in Northern Ireland during *'The Troubles'* with the IRA, then in Afghanistan, then the Second Gulf War in Iraq and again in Afghanistan. The emotional problems involved in modern warfare, the speed of making difficult decisions involving life and death situations, the advantages and disadvantages of helicopter warfare were all brought home to the audience who were given an insight into the stresses and strains of being a pilot in the difficult circumstances of modern warfare.

In early 2019 the Society will hold lectures on *'The Digital Society'*, *'The Development of Public Libraries'*, and *'Crime and Punishment in the 21st Century.'* Meetings are held in the Caversham Heights Methodist Church Hall on Highmoor Road every alternate Wednesday at 8pm, following coffee at 7.15pm. New members are always welcome. Further information can be found at www.cavershamheights.org or by email to: contact@cavershamheights.org

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Planning decisions relating to the Caversham area

Appeals

In November, it was announced that the Planning Appeal for 245 houses on the Caversham boundary at Dunsden had been dismissed. The campaign group CAGE brought together South Oxfordshire Parish Councils, associations in Caversham and Emmer Green and concerned individuals. Financial contributions enabled a barrister to be employed along with registration as a Rule 6 party. As a Rule 6 party, CAGE was able, through their barrister, to question witnesses and to make a closing statement. This statement, and others are available at www.cadra.org.uk/en/Planning. Final comments included:

"Over the six days that the Inquiry has sat, we have heard many local people express their ... 'heartfelt concerns' about the proposal. Many locals have attended several days of the inquiry, and the fact that local residents got organised and formed Campaign against Eye and Dunsden, becoming a Rule 6 party to these proceedings, again indicating the level of concern that this appeal causes them".

"...this appeal is parasitic on Reading and blatantly undermines the Council's spatial strategy. The houses are not needed to meet a lack of supply in Reading, and with a five-year supply, they are certainly not needed to meet a shortfall in South Oxfordshire".

In his report the Inspector considered:

- Development Plan policies
- The Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal
- Housing land supply
- Character and appearance (including landscape)
- Benefits of the proposal

The Inspector concluded that the substantial weights given to the harms would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the ... moderate and limited weights... to the benefits ...

Following this decision, we heard that two further appeals in Reading have been dismissed so that fine heritage buildings in both Craven Road and Brunswick Hill have been saved from demolition.

High-Rise Development

The principle that high-rise buildings in Reading would be located centrally, thus avoiding higher buildings outside the centre, was established in the previous Reading Local Plan. As the next Local Plan moves towards adoption more detailed frameworks are being established, and we are increasingly seeing the principle become a reality.

We await final outcomes for the Station Hill development. Outline proposals for the Royal Mail site were the subject of a public exhibition at the end of November. These include 650 housing units, offices, retail, and space for community rooms and a health centre. Much the highest element would be a 24-storey tower near the northern entrance to Reading Station. The site would be separated from the existing business park by a tree-lined avenue. A planning application is expected to follow on.

The SSE site lying between the Thames and Vastern Road has always been considered very important and may, in time, provide a more direct pedestrian and cycle access. Possible proposals are just beginning to emerge.

St Peter's Conservation Area

On 21 November 2018, the Council formally adopted the revisions to the Conservation Area which now extends over Bridge Street to Caversham Bridge and in the other direction to take in part of Church Street including the former Priory Avenue Surgery and the Nationwide BS with Age Concern and the telephone exchange opposite. This does not set all of that area in aspic and the report is clear that some parts would benefit from sympathetic development. However, it does mean that decisions have to be taken with much greater care.

This is the culmination of over two years work by members of CADRA and the Conservation Area Advisory Committee. Liz Killick was a member of both teams and played a very important part in bringing this to fruition, with excellent technical support from her husband Les. Very sadly, Liz died on 26 November just after the Council decision and just as this article was being completed. Despite her illness, Liz was determined to see her contribution completed. She cared deeply about Caversham and will be very greatly missed.
 CADRA

Proposals for Reading Station North development site

Plans are afoot for a substantial redevelopment initiative on the former Royal Mail depot on the Caversham Road in Reading. There are many reasons why this initiative will be of interest to Caversham residents and to readers of *Caversham Bridge*. Reading now has an impressive rail station and associated civil engineering works on the railway lands and electrification has modernized railway infrastructure. Hopefully, 2019 will see the completion of bridge works at Cow Lane to help reconnect Caversham to Tilehurst and West Reading with freer flowing traffic and less congestion. From the end of 2019, Reading will be at the western end of the Crossrail System and the Elizabeth Line. The next decade may well see a direct rail link to Heathrow airport. The proposed development of the site could be a further enhancement to the railway station and its adjacent built environment.

Hermes Investment Management have recently outlined plans for the former Royal Mail depot on the Caversham Road in conjunction with Reading Metropolitan (www.readingmet.co.uk). The site is allocated for redevelopment within Reading Borough Council's Local Plan and previously had planning permission granted for a high-rise mixed-use scheme, which has since expired.

The development is already attracting a good deal of interest and comment in Reading's local media and views are inevitably mixed. In all probability a formal planning application can

be anticipated at some stage.

Of course the development proposal may not directly affect Caversham, but as Caversham faces Reading and daily life links all our local urban communities the north side of the River is always drawn in. Traffic congestion and extended 'rush hour' periods are already a fact of Caversham life. Caversham Globe and Econet make us aware of pollution and air quality dangers. Extending the central area housing stock (which the residential element of the proposal is likely to do) may be seen by many as a positive. Town centre living may also benefit the condition of Reading's town centre which like others up and down the country is facing changes and challenges of adaptation. On the other hand it is to be hoped that such centripetal forces will not work against the interests and amenities of local neighbourhoods like Caversham and Emmer Green.

Caversham residents will want to keep a watching eye on the Reading Station North development and the future plans for use of the former Royal Mail depot. Many will remember its construction not so long ago as well as the business rationale behind it. Perhaps a casualty of the digital communications revolution and about to be replaced by another revolution in architecture, planning and priorities.

(Stephen A. Roberts)

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ENVIRONMENT

Rebuilding Caversham Bridge

Whilst this month's picture is not very good photographically, it is interesting. The original print is small – 2 inches by 3 inches – and it is one of three showing preparations for the rebuilding of the bridge, which must have been taken in 1924, and which came my way in November last year.

Watching other people work is often fascinating, and in the picture we have four onlookers, one of them a tram driver at the terminus. The Reading Corporation Tramways never did cross either of the bridges to reach Caversham, and nor did the trolleybuses. In the past, crossing the river was not always straightforward. Until the building of the iron bridge, which opened in 1869, you had to pay a toll to use Caversham Bridge, and many people preferred to use the ferry, which was cheaper!

The tramcar advertises Milward's shoes, and Maple's, the London furniture shop in Tottenham Court Road which closed in 1997. For a short while in the 1980s, they had a Reading branch in The Butts Centre – now the Broad Street Mall.

Part of the Caversham Bridge Hotel appears behind the tramcar. It was built on the site of an old inn called The White Hart in 1890. The new hotel was later bought by Reading Corporation, because it was in the way of the proposed new bridge. It was demolished and rebuilt about 1912, only a short distance from the old hotel, but then the First World War intervened.

A new road bridge, Reading Bridge was opened in 1923, and



when this happened, work could start on a replacement for the old narrow iron Caversham Bridge. The replacement bridge was opened by the Prince of Wales in 1926.

The Caversham Bridge Hotel lasted until 1988. I can remember the dining-room, which looked over a lawn leading down to the river. Eventually it was replaced by the Caversham Hotel (which wasn't technically in Caversham), later called the Holiday Inn and now the Crowne Plaza.

In our picture, behind the hoarding is a mound of earth, a man with a horse, what appears to be a steam engine, and a steam crane, and to the right of the hoarding is the start of the temporary footbridge which existed while the old bridge was being demolished, and

the new bridge of reinforced concrete with granite balustrades was being built. One of the signs on the hoarding reads: 'Bicycles must be wheeled, not ridden, over the bridge.' I cannot make out the wording on the other sign. For the next few years, motor vehicles would have to use Reading Bridge.

The period charm of the scene is enhanced by the Reading gas-lamp in the foreground, with elegant fluted column and pointed finial, and the scrolled ironwork of the pole and bracket supporting the overhead wires for the electric trams. This is one of those pictures that makes me wish I had been there, and able to walk into it and see a bit more, for an hour or two at any rate!

Happy Wanderer

Mapledurham Playing Fields – a commentary on the Landscape Plan

There was an interesting article in the November issue of *Caversham Bridge* about the archaeological work being undertaken 'as part of preparation work required for landscape improvements' at Mapledurham Playing Fields. It did not give any details of those 'improvements'. The Landscape Plan was primarily created by Reading Borough Council to offset the impact of the proposed building of the Heights School. Additional objectives were to enhance the site and raise its profile.

A major impact of building the school would be the loss of several football pitches. To prevent objections from the major football stakeholders, it was necessary to maintain the existing number of pitches. The only way this could be achieved was to take land currently occupied by mature trees and from the children's playground area which would be relocated. The trees affected include the existing row of mature Lombardy Poplars and all 15 mature trees near the current playground, one of which is a particularly elegant conical lime. If the poplars and the lime were on private property they would have tree preservation orders (TPOs) on them. One wonders how this can be described as an improvement to the landscape.

Additionally, the Plan proposes to remove two of the discreet planting areas adjacent to the property boundaries of Chazey Road. These were planted by volunteers in 2000 to form a green corridor from the woodland. The plan does include some replacement trees along the boundaries but it will be many years before they reach maturity.

The proposal also includes planting an avenue of non-native trees along a pathway all the way from the Chazey Road entrance to the proposed school. This pathway would be lit at night, which may seem out of keeping with the current nature of the fields. If this has to happen planting mature, native trees would encourage the early colonisation of dependent animal species.

No amount of new planting can immediately replace the loss of habitat arising from the removal of mature trees, and it will be decades before the new trees approach the size of those that are currently scheduled to be removed. Any Landscape Plan for the fields should enhance the existing space with a pleasing aspect, room for a range of recreational activities and a chance to enjoy the natural world. This includes the trees for their beauty, their shade and the food and shelter they provide for many insects, birds and bats.

The Landscape Plan will be subject to a planning application in the New Year when there will be an opportunity to express views.

This commentary on the Landscape Plan comes from 'The Friends of Mapledurham Playing Fields'. The Friends are a group that meets once a month working to improve the Fields environmentally and aesthetically.

(Editors' note: See the following document available through the Reading Council website for documentation on the evolution of the proposals and an outline of the Landscape Plan: <http://www.reading.gov.uk/media/8942/180620allpapers/pdf/180620allpapers.pdf>)

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Wilfred Owen Day: 10th November 2018

A WW1 anti-tank bullet inscribed 'Un Souvenir de la Guerre'... a crucifix fashioned out of bullets... both ironic and iconic, and grasped in the warmth of your hand.

Held in Dunsden Church, where Owen was lay preacher for two years, the 'Wilfred Owen Day', on 10th November, 2018, fused past and present, art and literature, painting and poetry.

John Bodman, co-founder and co-chair with Jennifer Leach, of the Dunsden Owen Association, welcomed visitors from Ors, near Sambre sur Oise where Owen died on 4th November, 1918. The church was packed to capacity. Jean Eastwood, so instrumental in shaping the Association and charting Owen's time here, movingly read 'The Send Off' with its evocation of country lads, country lanes and country wells.

Indeed, the event was a 'send off' for a very special book commemorating Owen's work, illustrated by local contemporary artists and produced by the press founded by Peter Hay in 1994. The company is committed to celebrating local literary talent, past and present, and to developing a co-operative of artists and writers creating a vibrant arts scene. Previous publications include Wilde's famous 'Ballad of Reading Gaol', 'The Arts of Peace' and 'The Memoirs of Edith Morley' (a ground-breaking woman and professor of English whose encouragement of young Owen buoyed him when others were encouraging him to give up). What a debt we owe to her and to those who today encourage and promote artistic endeavour.

Jane Potter, who wrote the 'Afterword' for 'Pennies on my Eyes', is a Reader in Arts at the Oxford International Centre for Publishing, at Oxford Brookes University. She gave a cogent, penetrating

talk encompassing Owen's life at Dunsden, his links to Reading University, and his family connections to the local area. She revealed how his time in Dunsden unequivocally changed his life and his poetry, shaping his courageous decision to re-evaluate both. Here was food for all – for those knowing the key Owen poems and for the passionate aficionados. With just five poems published in his lifetime, tribute was paid to those who kept his name and poetry alive, including, among others, his mother, Sassoon, Blunden, Heaney and Hughes. She chose resonating details: his love of the colour purple, his piano playing, the children in Dunsden school, his horror at the rural deprivation, and his brother's strange vision of Wilfred in his ship's cabin. The material was captivating. In 1917, a New Year's Eve letter to his mother showed his confidence that he could become a 'poet's poet'. His style, voice and content were assured. The cadences, emotions, innovations and imagery still sing out today. His poem 'A Terre' portrays the bandages obscuring the narrator's vision; 'Pennies on my Eyes' with its poetry, artwork and 'Afterword' symbolically removes them.

Near a plaque, erected on the wall in 1978 in the presence of the Bishop of Oxford and attended by the likes of Ted Hughes and John Stallworthy, a reading of Owen's 'Smile, Smile, Smile' was given by Prof. Peter Pearson, of Radio 4's 'Poetry Please' fame, and Lauren Leach-Scrivens, a student at Gillotts School, tellingly read 'Anthem for Doomed Youth': what a moving contrast of ages, voices and emphasis.

Three of the local artists chosen to illustrate the poems gave insights into their approaches. Sally Castle showed how her research

at The Imperial War Museum shaped her 'visions' – slippers, china tea cups, white feathers, gas masks, blending home life and trenches, politics and people, trench signs and trampled barbed wire posing as a question mark.

Martin Andrews responded to the creative challenge by creating generic rather than specific evocations for particular poems. His grandfather's WW1 treasures, shown lovingly to him as a boy featured strongly; the cherished items – the bullet and the crucifix, generously passed around to each and every one of us, were truly touching in every sense. His grandfather's bugle, given away to a boy down his road, must surely be sounding out for its rightful 'last post' – to be reunited with Martin.

Jennifer Leach (an artist, writer, editor, well known for Outrider Anthems, The Reading Festival of the Dark, and Song of Crow) illustrated 'Strange Meeting' and 'Insensibility'. Sheltering from a rainstorm in the church lobby, she discovered the Owen connection – a personal 'strange meeting'.

Peter's reading of 'Insensibility' in this packed church gave hope that, now, someone bothers! The final reading, 'Dulce et Decorum est', was a fitting end, focusing painfully on the eyes of a comrade in his death throes. There were no 'old lies' here.

'Pennies on my Eyes' has achieved a new vision – to expose the obverse of the coins! Owen's poetic art and experiences like this event enable us to see the world, multifaceted, through the eyes of others. 'Pennies on my Eyes' no longer. Walking back through the churchyard, on the way home, the way was lit by the flickering lamps on the Owen family graves, illuminating our pathways 100 years on.

Quakers and peace: then and now



On Tuesday 28th November the Dunsden Owen Association concluded its series of four talks with a session about pacifism in World War 1 and what it is to be a Quaker working for peace today. What better way to end a season marking the centenary of the armistice of a war that was supposed to end all wars? Ruth and Mark Tod are members of the Henley Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (or Quakers) – a non-judgmental Christian denomination that was founded in the mid-17th century by George Fox. They gave a well-illustrated and compelling talk which was enlivened by some powerful

personal testimony from both principal speakers and members of the audience.

During the First World War, pacifist Quakers made up a large proportion of some 16,000 registered conscientious objectors. They were the butt of considerable hostility, both at the hands of harshly judgemental military tribunals and from members of the public, who would often hand non-combatants a white feather as a symbol of their perceived cowardliness.

Some pacifists were ordered to fight and subsequently shot when they refused to do so; others had their sentences commuted to ten years of hard labour. Some gladly became members of medical corps, whilst others carried out 'work of national importance' of various kinds. Others were actively involved in different kinds of war relief work. Dr Hilda Clark was one Quaker who regularly challenged convention by not only being actively involved in medical relief work but also by being a woman who drove a car, at a time when they were still rare.

In the second half of their presentation, Ruth and Mark Tod concentrated on contemporary efforts by Quakers to work for peace. A fascinating series of initiatives across the world was described, including Quaker-facilitated closed sessions of 'quiet diplomacy' at major international treaty negotiations, as well as many grassroots initiatives aimed at bringing together those who would otherwise mistrust each other because of their differences. Sessions in schools, a regular meal in London for Muslims, Christians and Jews of all kinds, gatherings of young people of different African groups, and 'listening circles' for those who have been the victim of conflict. The focus was on Quakers first enabling these peace-making programmes and then stepping back so that they could be self-sufficient. Each new initiative



one small step towards greater peace in the world.

Ruth and Mark's final theme was that 'remembrance is not enough' – positive action is required of those that

commit to a more peaceful world. A thought-provoking end to a fascinating presentation, which was followed by some equally thought-provoking discussion amongst the audience afterwards.

Your writer was still musing on all this the following afternoon when, by complete chance, he met 2001 European Woman of the Year, Detta Regan. Detta founded www.followthewomen.com, after gathering together 270 women from all over the world, including America, Palestine, Britain and Iraq, to ride bicycles for over 300 kilometres through Lebanon, Syria and Jordan to campaign for peace and an end to violence in the region. Yet more proof positive that individual efforts can create powerful waves, and perhaps the subject of a future Dunsden Owen Association talk in 2019.

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Rosehill WI

President Arlene Riley welcomed all members (and two visitors) to our November meeting on a fairly warm but windy afternoon. Arlene also asked for volunteers for the 'Green Challenge', more details of this will be given at our January meeting.

Judith Sharp (Treasurer) said that next year's subscriptions are now due (at a cost of £42.00) and she will be issuing envelopes in December to collect this. She also told us that calendars for 2019 are available for sale. The birthday buttonholes were then distributed: happy birthday to all concerned. Scrabble club will be on 14th and 28th November respectively. The Book Club will meet at the beginning of December, and Barbara Wood will be on the lookout for a suitable film for the cinemagoers to visit. Gill Sawyer has kindly offered to take on the assembly of the emergency packs for A&E at the Royal Berks Hospital - thank you Gill. Brenda Caborn reported that she had bags for sale (at a cost of £1 each) and this is in aid of 'Champions to End Loneliness'.

Arlene introduced our speakers: two ladies from the Pangbourne Cheese Shop, one of whom gave a very interesting talk. During the talk we were able to taste four cheeses, one a very creamy Brie, the second a Goat cheese, the third a Cheddar and the final one a Stilton. Our speaker told us about these cheeses and their provenance. After the tasting we were asked to say which cheese we preferred and the Brie was considered the best with the Goat cheese coming in fourth. Thank you ladies for a very enjoyable afternoon.

We meet on the first Wednesday of the month at St Barnabas Village Hall, Emmer Green, at 2.00pm.

Chazey WI

Twenty three members and three guests were welcomed to the November meeting by the Vice President, who took the chair, as our President, who although present, had recently broken her leg. Our speaker for the evening was Mike Payne who gave us a talk on Pinewood Studios which the members enjoyed very much. Tea and cake followed plus a lot of enjoyable chat! Dates were given out for Coffee, Lunch, Book Club, Art Club and Knitting Club.

The treasurer gave a short report to the members and then announced she was retiring and we had a new treasurer, Carol Briscoe, to take over. Birthday celebrations this month are for Jean Turner and Jean Fry. Volunteers are needed for the quiz team to compete in the 'Interquiz' on 29 January 2019. The outing to the Milestone Museum at Basingstoke was very successful. For more information about Chazey WI please email: chazeywi@gmail.com.

Caversham WI

Our late autumn meetings have rushed by and preparations have been made for the last meeting of the year in December. Our duties at the Caversham Court Tea kiosk have finished after

a long and sunny season of making cakes and serving teas in what must be the best park in Reading. At the October meeting our speaker was an expert in the history of the many crossings of The River Thames and he told us of the effects they had on the towns and villages surrounding the river. This also created a spirited discussion on the present state of the four crossings locally, especially the Sonning Bridge. One of our members gave us very positive feedback from her recent visit to the WI Denman College at Abingdon.

The November meeting began with a report from a WI member about her trip to Russia to train with cosmonauts and her experience of weightless flight. Plans have been made for seasonal activities in December, including a Christmas meal out together, our combined Birthday and Christmas supper with dancing and a trip to see 'Guys and Dolls' later in January 2019.

Ladies are very welcome to visit our friendly group. We hold meetings on the third Thursday of the month at 7.30pm, which helps to avoid childcare issues. There is nearby parking and a lift to the first floor meeting room at Church House, Church Road, RG4 8AX. More details can be found on line at <https://tinyurl.com/hwzj6zy> or search for Caversham WI. For enquiries contact our Secretary on 0118 947 5176.

The changing River Thames

An enthusiastic audience of over 120 people gathered at the CADRA Open Meeting on 6th November to hear a presentation by Terry Marsh, Honorary Fellow at the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology at Wallingford, entitled 'The River Thames; A study of Change'.

Prior to the main speaker, Peter Valance, Chair of Caversham Good Neighbours, told the audience about the campaign to target loneliness. He urged every member of the audience to each do one little thing to combat loneliness and make Caversham a good place in which to live.

Terry explained that the River Thames is not a massive river in international terms but has exceptional national and international significance. The river originally drained from North Wales and out into the North Sea. With glaciation, it became a tributary of the Rhine. Today, it rises in the Cotswolds and runs 346 kilometres to its tidal limit. With no waterfalls or rapids, it is very navigable, and so always strategically important. Terry spoke of the Vikings coming up the Thames and how Reading Abbey was built at a junction of routes based on the river. He described how Caversham was important for the building of barges to carry goods along the river.

London's population doubled to two million between 1800 and 1840. With night soil no longer being collected and sold, the volume of raw sewage discharged into the Thames increased steeply. In the 1831-32 cholera outbreak 6,000 people died and 14,000 Londoners died in 1848-49 in addition to fatalities from Typhoid. In 1858, the Big Stink caused Parliament to close and the following years sewers were constructed.

Thames floods are not new. In AD 48 the river overflowed, extending over four counties, and 10,000 people drowned. The recorded level of the Thames was far higher than the level in the 1947 floods, for example in 1594, 1774, 1809 and 1894. Flooding occurs for different reasons. It can be a flash flood from intense rainfall, tidal flooding which is an increasing risk with rising sea levels or the rarer but persistent groundwater flooding as occurred at the Flowing Spring public house. Snowmelt was a major factor in the 1947 floods and that particular risk may reduce with global warming. Floodplain development exacerbates flood risk, underlining the importance of planning controls and sustainable urban drainage.

The Thames is the dominant water supply source for London and so we must also consider the effect of drought and water shortage. In August 1976, the Thames ceased to flow in its upper reaches after the most intense drought of modern times. In 2018, the Thames basin saw the hottest April-August on record but was moderated by inflow of groundwater.

In the last 15 years there have been efforts to enrich the habitat of the Thames by working to increase its diversity. The Withymead Nature Reserve near Goring is an example of this work, and it is a magical place where otters can be seen. Terry kindly made his presentation available and you can find it at www.cadra.org.uk/en/Events

Pastoral news from Caversham Heights Methodist Church



Congratulations to Peter Bernard, the organist at Caversham Heights Methodist Church, who celebrated his 50th Birthday on Sunday 4th November.

Much to his surprise, at the commencement of the service the Minister Jenny Dowding called Peter from behind his curtain so that everyone could sing 'Happy Birthday' to him, a birthday cake with lit candles, an organ keyboard and a figure depicting Peter was brought from the vestry by Margaret Ellison who had made the cake.



Peter also received a birthday card signed by members of the congregation.

Several hymns which were Peter's favourites had been chosen for the occasion. At the conclusion of the service Peter delighted the congregation by playing 'Finlandia' by Sibelius.



Rev'd Jenny Dowding and Peter Bernard enjoying coffee and cake after the service.

New hymn book by local writer and lay preacher

Local writer and Lay Preacher Colin Ferguson has just published a book of over 100 hymns to familiar tunes. Colin, who is a member of the Hymn Society, has several books of worship material previously published, but this is the first of two books which cover his work over the years. This one is with familiar tunes and the second will include the music that has been written for him

After a career in the probation service Colin says that his worship material has more to do with the human condition and our daily bread rather than holiness. His hymns can be read as well as sung. Some are prayers, some have been the basis for discussion groups.

'Dare to believe' sums up the message of the book which at £8.00 including post and packing is a valuable supplement to any church's worship collection.

Here is an example of one of the Christmas hymns in the book.

Soon, very soon, our Saviour will be born,
shown through the words of prophets, priests and kings;
here is God's promise to the world made flesh.
Soon comes the day that makes the angels sing.

Soon, very soon the wilderness makes way;
a voice proclaims the coming of the Lord;
the desert blooms will burst into full flower
and God will show the glory of his word.

Soon, very soon, a baby will be born
and his young maiden mother will rejoice,
her song of joy and blessing shall ring out.
and choirs of angels to the world give voice.

Soon, very soon a star will brightly shine,
and travellers from far away will see
and journey to a lowly stable yard
to find the reason for the mystery.

Soon, very soon the church bells will be rung
as heaven descends to earth on Christmas day,
in Bethlehem there comes a baby's cry
that echoes through the years and here today.

(Sung to the tune for 'Tell out my soul' (Woodlands))

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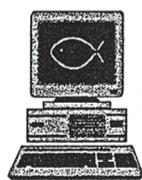
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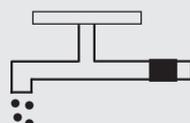
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