

Chairman's Report

Christmas is nearly with us once more and the Christmas lights switch on went well. Many people have commented on how nice it was to see the Burrell engines on display on the Market Place with the backdrop of the illuminated Guildhall behind. Congratulations should go to all involved. The Burrell Museum & Ancient House were both open late and received hundreds of visitors that day.

Since I last wrote to you we have had the Family Activity Day centred around the Dragon Boat Races on the river. This turned out to be a wonderful event for the town and the Thetford Society tent was visited by in excess of 350 children who all received one of our



colouring books about the town. I have been asked to point out that the funding for the day came from the Town Manager's budget.

The Library has been the subject of much comment within the Society recently following the removal of notice boards and general conduct of users. We hope to have the town's Librarian to speak to us at our January meeting to explain the new 'inclusive' attitude being promoted.

The Charles Burrell & Rosemary Musker High Schools are each seeking Specialist School status, the former in Humanities and the latter in Technology & Modern Foreign Languages. In order to achieve this, each school is required to raise £50,000 by 28th February 2007. If this achieved the government will then add £200,000 to improve facilities and each year the schools will receive an extra £129 per student on the roll. A joint appeal is in progress and at a recent committee meeting The Thetford Society agreed to contribute £500 towards the appeal. Anyone wishing to donate should contact the Appeal Organiser, David Napier on (01953) 498554.

The Burrell Museum has had in excess of 4,300 visitors this year, The Ancient House, Museum of Thetford Life recorded nearly 1,300 in its first

complete month since reopening and the BTO has had 1,600 in 2006. These figures and the continued growth of the Dad's Army tours certainly justify the town council's faith in keeping the Tourist Information Centre open. With the Brecks gaining greater recognition as a unique place to visit, thanks to the Brecks Tourism Partnership, the Military Museum at Barnham seeking accredited museum status and the opening of the Distillery Visitor Centre at East Harling in 2007 visitor numbers to the area will continue to grow. It is just a shame that the signage to the Museums is so poor and doesn't seem to get the recognition they deserve from the road junctions within the town. I understand at long last, the pedestrian finger posts within the town centre are to have a lick of paint and are to be secured in place pointing in the right direction!

Many of you have asked about calendars, the Society decided against doing one this year as we were competing against another Thetford one last year. The Tourist Information Centre has sourced a calendar with Thetford views and this is on sale at the TIC priced £6. Telephone 820689 to reserve your copy.

Environment

Thetford has had its Growth Point Status confirmed with a projected 5,500 new homes expected in the next 15 years. The government have awarded Breckland £150,000 to work up the initial master plan to accommodate these dwellings along with the businesses to support employment for this population. The Society is very concerned that this increased growth should only occur when the infrastructure is in place to cope with the increased population. Doctors, Dentists, Schools, Sewerage, Transport, Function Rooms and other town centre facilities are all in need of extra capacity as it is. There is also a very big fear that strategic town centre sites which will be needed to service the increased population are being developed piecemeal leaving no sites for new facilities such as a new Bus Station or increased parking provision for the Railway Station. Until the new area plan has been adopted these pockets of development will continue and we will end up trying to squeeze a quart into a pint pot.

Breckland Council are launching a campaign for Community Rangers. Volunteers will receive an information pack so they can easily get in touch and report issues such as broken streetlights, fly-tipping and full litter bins. Community groups who want to get

more involved and organise local clean ups can borrow equipment, such as litter picks, gloves, high visibility jackets and spray which removes graffiti. Anybody interested in becoming a community ranger should call 01362 656878.

English Heritage has finally agreed to enhance security of the Priory following some dogged campaigning from Society member Stuart Wilson. The Healthy Living Centre opens in early 2007 and concern has been expressed about the transport to the new site. Initially we were informed the Centre would be served by a bus service this has yet to materialise. The Croxton Road junction is already congested and pedestrian access also needs to be improved. Norfolk County Council is to do a traffic impact study but this will not be until well into the New Year. Society member Digby Smith is organising a petition to get this brought forward. This was one of the issues raised at the recent transport strategy which was reported to our November meeting. The issue of the Bus Station was one of great concern as, whilst deliberations continue, potential sites are fast disappearing and the uncertainty has the knock on effect of property developers holding on to their potentially lucrative sites without any inclination to improve them.

Revised plans have come forward for the land on Norwich Road with a reduced number of properties and incorporating a number of other suggestions made by the Society, such as more open space and designs sympathetic to other buildings in the area. Breckland have turned down an application for a 'towering' development in Earl's Street. Whilst a number of other sites in the town centre have gained planning permission and are being sold on to developers.

Activities Report

All members should have received a list of all the forward speakers' dates and venues until the next AGM in September together with all the proposed outings and social events. Some speakers have yet to confirm and whether the trips will run will depend on the numbers wishing to go. For new members we usually arrange a visit to the Nunnery Stud on their open day in June. We can also arrange a trip to the ILPH at a cost of £5 per head. If anyone wishes to take advantage of either trip please let Danny Jeffrey know on (01842) 753770.

Meetings

Since September we had Ian Shepherd of the CPRE giving their view on Thetford's Growth Point Status. We have to be wary that the infrastructure can cope with the increased housing and population. Also in September we had a special meeting and were shown a presentation of the town's development proposals for the Carnegie Room And Guildhall. Those present were asked to give their views. In October we visited the British Trust for Ornithology and were given a talk on the buildings and the BTO itself and had the opportunity to look round the new library. The November speaker was unable to get back from London, so Danny Jeffery filled in talking about what

had been discussed at a recent Transport Strategy meeting. The December meeting should have been the new Thetford Healthy Living Centre but since a public meeting was previously arranged by Society member Digby Smith, to which members could go, we changed the subject to 'Local Butterflies'. Rob Parker, Suffolk Butterflies Conservation Officer gave an illustrated talk which was very well received.

Outings



We had a very successful trip to St Peter's Brewery and Southwold in September and a trip to see 'Grease' at the Theatre Royal, Norwich in November. The London trip on 16th December was combined with Terry Jermy's Go Further Travel.

Three of us attended the East of England Association of Civic Trust Societies' AGM in October. Our own Janet Smith-Gibbons has taken the post of Secretary to the committee. We had a tour of Hertford, a similar sized town to Thetford (which appears to get better support from its local authority) and we were given a talk about the proposed expansion of Stansted Airport.

Future Activities

Meetings - United Reformed Church at 7.30pm unless stated otherwise:

- Jan 6th Xmas Social, **Carnegie Room** 7.30pm.
Tickets £6.00 from Danny Jeffrey
- Jan 9th St Matthew's Society - Rodney Back
- Feb 9th Christopher Fraser MP, **Methodist Hall**
7.30pm
- Mar 6th Moving Thetford Forward - Various
Speakers
- Apr 3rd Father of the Brontes - Corinne Turner

Outings & Events

- Feb 3rd Thomas Paine Dinner, Thomas Paine Hotel.
Tickets £20.00 from Stuart Wright
- Feb 10th Symphony Concert, St Andrew's Hall
Norwich. Depart Bus Station 6.30pm
- Apr 1st Museum of East Anglian Life, Stowmarket.
Depart Bus Station 9.30am.

Anyone interested please contact Danny Jeffrey (01842) 753770

Other Forthcoming Events in Thetford

- Jan 18th Mrs Pat's Coffee Morning - United
Reformed Church 10-12.
- Jan 20th Thetford Concert Club - The Shantymen,
Guildhall 7.30pm.
- Feb 15th Mrs Pat's Coffee Morning - United
Reformed Church 10-12 .
- Mar 15th Mrs Pat's Coffee Morning - United
Reformed Church 10-12.
- Apr 21st Thetford Concert Club - St George's Day
Concert, Carnegie Room 7.30pm.