

Autumn 2003 Newsletter

Message from the Chairma

Welcome to the Autumn 2003 newsletter. For those of you who have access to the Internet, you will be able to read a full report of the last AGM held on 1 May when I mentioned the work of the Society in Ealing Centre Partnership and also concerns on the proposed tram scheme. Since then, TfL have listened to the views of concerned local residents about the potential for diversion of traffic on to residential roads. Alternative schemes were being considered until everything went on hold at the end of the summer when TfL's funding crisis forced them to take stock of the tram scheme. It is expected that the consultation process will re-start later this year but a final decision on the scheme is unlikely to be made until late next year. In the meantime, TfL are pressing ahead with proposals for replacing the two railway bridges on the North Circular Road at Hanger Lane which raise important issues about loss of trees and land, exchange land and the design of the bridges themselves. Also, the Licensing Act is now in force and local authorities, including Ealing, are expected to draw up licensing policies on which the future licensing regime in areas will be based. The Society will take an active role in all these issues and we will keep you informed on progress. In the meantime I look forward to seeing you at the award ceremony on 21 October.

Bob Gurd, Chairman

Ealing Civic Society Annual Award Scheme 2003

This year's design awards will be presented by Councillor Stephen Sears, the Borough's new Design Champion. The Society has agreed to participate in an exciting new initiative which the borough is undertaking to introduce greater emphasis on design in all new planning schemes. Stephen will no doubt be explaining more at the ceremony. The Society has, of course, led the way in this area through its own Award scheme which is now in its 13th year. For the second year running, the Ealing Times are running an Internet based competition for the award and you can see pictures of the short-listed entries online on their web page at www.ealingtimes.co.uk:

Gurdwara Temple, Havelock Road, Southall (Sikh Temple)

17 Mount Avenue, Ealing (refurbishment of existing house)

Farnell Place off Pierrepont Road, Acton (new bungalow development)

Springfield Playing Fields, Rosemont Road, Acton (new children's playground)

Rocket Public House, Churchfield Road, Acton (refurbishment)
Red Lion, St Mary's Road, Ealing (extension and refurbishment)
North Acton Playing Fields, Westfield Road, Acton (new children's playground)

Come along to the awards ceremony to hear which are the winners!

The future of the Society

Earlier this year a special meeting of the Ealing Civic Society executive looked at the future of the society. We noted the many strengths of the Society such as experience, persistence and respect on the part of the Council and other bodies that we deal with. But there are weaknesses, in particular our work is not widely known and our membership is ageing. There are many opportunities facing us, for example through the Ealing Centre Partnership. But there are also threats, for example through the new legislation on licensing, single issue campaigns which can attract a great deal of attention away from our work and also the changing social profile of the borough. We want to expand our horizons and get involved in more projects, for example those involving the civic realm, and at the same time provide more events for our members. If you have suggestions for the 2004 programme we would like to hear from you.

Changes in Executive Committee

Vivien Irish has recently said that due to other commitments she would have to step down from the committee. We are grateful to Vivien for her work on licensing and, in particular, for her numerous appearances at various hearings for entertainments and alcohol licences. Jim McLaughlin has kindly agreed to take on responsibility for licensing matters. Nevertheless, further help with the work of the society is needed. If you would like to help we would be delighted to welcome you to committee meetings, perhaps initially as an observer.

Brian Harris 1933 - 2003

It is with great sadness that the Society records the sudden death of its Secretary Brian Harris in July this year. Brian had not been well for some time, but had continued in his role as secretary and attended the AGM in May. Brian joined Thames Valley University in 1965, when it was Ealing Technical College, as a lecturer. There he taught on a variety of courses in geography, European studies and urban studies. He completed two masters degrees while working there (an MA in Education and a MSc in Regional and Urban Planning). He retired from teaching in 1995. His knowledge of planning and Local Government combined with a deep knowledge of Ealing and commitment to protecting its unique quality was invaluable to the Society in dealing with difficult conservation and planning issues. Brian served on the Executive Committee for over a decade and was its secretary for 5 years. He particularly relished organising the collection and assessment of entries for the Society's annual award scheme. He represented the Society on the London Forum and Ealing Centre Partnership where he chaired the West Ealing Group.

He will be sorely missed.

2003 Civic Society Annual Lecture

The 2003 Annual Lecture on 26 June was given by George Perry, author of 'Forever Ealing', and Sean Hinton, managing director of the Studios.

George Perry provided an amusing summary of the history of the studios. He described the early days of the studios after it was founded by Will Barker in 1902 and explained why Ealing was chosen as the site for the studios in the first place. This was because being on the western and largely non-industrial side of London the air was clearer which was a necessity for filming. Barker was a true entrepreneur. Casts would be hired from West End theatre productions to minimise costs and even Hamlet was filmed in a day. However like many others associated with the studios Barker experienced financial problems and ended up bankrupt.

The next noteworthy person to assume control was Basil Dean of Associated Talking Pictures in 1929. Dean was largely responsible for the building of the present studios. He was noted as a hard taskmaster but it was under his regime that stars such as George Formby and Gracie Fields sprung to national prominence. Sir Michael Balcon arrived in 1938 and it was under his stewardship that the world famous Ealing comedies were made in the early 1950s - very much the golden age of Ealing. However Ealing also had a distinguished war record as the location for Ministry of Information 'shorts' and later films such as the Cruel Sea.

Ealing Studios closed in 1955 whereupon the BBC took over the premises. George remarked that one of the few benefits of this was that as the BBC didn't spend much money the Associated Talking Pictures sound stages remained remarkably intact.

Sean Hinton indicated that he was very proud and excited to inherit the traditions of the studios. He briefly explained the new organisation of the studios as a consortium of Fragile Films and the Manhattan Loft Corporation and outlined the building development that has been undertaken over the past year. This will provide what was described as a 'community campus' with a particular emphasis on animation production

Whilst recognising the limitations of the site, for Ealing has three sound studios as compared to Pinewood's nineteen and Shepperton's twelve, Ealing is nevertheless unique in being both a studio for use by film production companies and a production company itself. In respect of the former, it has in recent years been used for Harry Potter, Star Wars, Kev and Perry and the BBC productions of Spooks and the Royle Family. In 2002, the film of The Importance of Being Earnest was the first to be made under the aegis of the new Ealing Studios production company.

The White House on Ealing Green will shortly be the location for a blue plaque in honour of Sir Michael Balcon.

Paul Fitzmaurice