



## Autumn 2005 Newsletter

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**Ealing Civic Society Annual Award  
Ceremony 2005**

**Thursday October 20<sup>th</sup>, Liz Cantell Room,  
Ealing Town Hall, 8.00pm**

***Speaker: Nigel Burton, Chairman of the  
Civic Trust***

**There will be a display of the plans of the  
short-listed entries and a short  
presentation by one of the award judges.  
Refreshments will be provided at the end of  
the ceremony.**

### Chairman's introduction

Welcome to the Autumn 2005 newsletter. This covers the Society's activities and current planning issues including TfL's proposals for replacing the Hanger Lane railway bridges, the future of the UGC cinema, New Broadway and the parlous state of the Council's Planning Department. Looking ahead we are very privileged to welcome Nigel Burton to the Society on 20<sup>th</sup> October to present our annual award. Nigel was a director of Waitrose before taking up his present post at the Civic Trust. The Civic Trust is at the forefront of a number of campaigns to improve our towns and cities and as registered member of the Trust we benefit from their expertise and organisational strength.

Transport for London proposed some years ago to replace the bridges at Hanger Lane with a new crossing in addition to the existing bridges thus allowing the road to be diverted whilst keeping the present bridges open. The new bridges will take some common land and TfL are obliged to replace

this with compensatory land. ECS and several local Residents' Associations have argued that this land should be placed on the Webb's site as well as at the end of Inglis Road as originally suggested by TfL. This has the effect of extending Ealing Common land further north, nearly to Ealing Village. I am pleased to report that TfL have now agreed to this. They have also agreed to reinstate the Inglis Road crossing which would have been lost under the original proposals. There are other improvements planned such as planting a tree barrier alongside Ealing Village which will help to screen the railway. Finally, TfL have undertaken to make the replacement bridges environmentally friendly and visually attractive particularly with the judicious use of greenery. Timing of the works is unclear but needs to start soon given the current state of the bridges.

Many of you may recall that a planning application was approved last year for the redevelopment of the UGC cinemas, Ealing Broadway into a new 16 screen multiplex. Before this came to fruition, UGC itself was taken over by a larger chain called Cineworld. As a condition of the take-over, Cineworld has agreed to dispose of 6 cinemas, including their Ealing operation. At the time of writing, the sale had not been completed, but several operators were known to be interested and there has been a strong rumour that Sky is the preferred bidder. It is very unlikely that the original redevelopment will proceed, and it is possible that the cinema site could be redeveloped for something completely different. In the meantime, the cinema is to remain open under the takeover rules and be handed over as a going concern. We'll

keep a close eye on events and keep you updated.

Any of you who have been trying to get in touch recently with Ealing's Planning Department will know how difficult it has been to do so. The Department has recently lost its head in the wake of the Council's Response Programme (a major management change programme designed to introduce new ways of working to the Council). This, coupled with a very large number of temporary planning staff, has meant that the small number of permanent staff remaining have been placed under intolerable pressures. Corners are being cut and there has been a lack of consistency in decision-making. Enforcement of planning regulations has also suffered. An unfortunate casualty of the latest hiatus has been the abandonment of an initiative to improve design in the Borough. The Society participated in several of the Urban Design Panels convened to consider new developments in Ealing, including the South Acton neighbourhood regeneration and the Daniel's redevelopment. It involved eminent architects who gave their time free to the Borough. Unfortunately, this initiative – one of the first in London - has crumbled away through lack of resources. We have been trying to get it revived, so far without success but there is a glimmer of hope on the horizon: a new design and conservation post in the Planning Department has recently been advertised which should lead to recruitment of much-needed extra resource.

*Bob Gurd, Chairman*

### **Ealing Civic Society Annual Public Lecture *Conservation - why bother?***

The Society's annual public lecture *Conservation - why bother?* was given on 5 July by Charles Mynors, an Ealing resident and member of the Society. He is a barrister specialising in planning and ecclesiastical law and author of a number of books and

articles on conservation and listed buildings legislation.

A review by English Heritage in 2000 tried to define the historic environment and concluded that it comprised 'the whole thing - the nasty bits as well as the good.' We are the trustees of our inheritance, each generation has made its mark and once a building or an environment has gone it has gone for ever. English Heritage noted that the disasters of the past 50 years had all been given planning permission!

The 19th century was a period of major development and an enthusiasm for the styles of the past: neo Gothic, neo-medieval and classical design, but no real contemporary design. It didn't occur to the Victorians that new buildings should fit into their surroundings. Since 1882 there has been a succession of legislation controlling development but much of our historic environment has continued to be lost, particularly where development pressures have been strongest.

The 'heritage industry' is prone to think that the nation's heritage is now complete, that there can be no more heritage! But if everything is heritage you have to decide what to keep for you can only aim to give special protection to specific buildings or areas. But how to decide what is special? Much of what we now consider to be of quality was considered rubbish 40 years ago! The costs and benefits of preservation versus destruction have to be weighed up.

We have a plethora of designations, statutory and non-statutory, giving varying levels of protection to our built heritage. But we need commitment and money to ensure repair and maintenance. There is no duty on owners to protect listed buildings but there are powers for local authorities to repair them or to compulsorily purchase them, but this needs money and political will.

The key battlegrounds are always where development pressure is greatest. After

World War II the planners were seen as the problem. John Betjeman said that they 'assisted with destruction, not creation' and famous examples of this include Worcester, Aylesbury, Churchill Square Brighton, and the original proposals for Ealing town centre (abandoned thanks to the intervention of Ealing Civic Society amongst others). There were battles at ministerial level – with Dame Evelyn Sharp accusing the planning minister Richard Crossman of 'preservationism.' In the 1970s Betjeman's poem about the devious ways developers achieved their aims summed up the new middle class obsession with preservation.

The pendulum has now swung in the opposite direction. There are 500,000 listed buildings in England, and at the present rate of loss of 100 per annum there are enough to last for 5000 years! We can't keep everything. We have to allow more development but we must record what we lose. In summary, we should keep the best of our heritage but replace the rest with something better.

*John Templeton*

### **Ealing Plaques**

Following the successful launch of the Plaque scheme earlier this year with the installation of the Waitrose bronze pavement plaque in front of the site of their first shop at 263 Acton High Street W3, we now have three possible plaques under consideration: William Willett, Nevil Shute and John Compton.

William Willett, who devised the idea of "daylight saving time" or British Summer Time, lived in Avenue Crescent, Mill Hill Park, Acton from 1887-1894. We are awaiting details on possible sponsorship for the Green Plaque, which will cost approximately £800 before proceeding any further. Nevil Shute, the author of *A town like Alice* and *On the Beach* had his childhood home in Somerset Road, West Ealing. His books are littered with references to the local area. The US-based Nevil Shute Foundation have offered to pay

half the cost but we also need to obtain the agreement of the owner of the house for the Plaque to be erected. We are also keen to support an application to English Heritage to erect a Blue Plaque to John Compton (1877-1957) in Audley Road. Compton was the famous builder of church, cinema and concert organs. He lived in Ealing from 1930 when he bought his newly built house from Haymills until his death in 1957. His organ works were at Chase Road, Park Royal.

*Mike Tiley*

### **Dorothea Lambert Chambers**



*Plaque to Dorothea Lambert Chambers unveiled by the mayoress, Councillor Mrs Julie Clements-Elliott accompanied by Ealing Lawn Tennis Club members (Photo: Tony Miller)*

An English Heritage Blue Plaque was unveiled at 7 North Common Road, W5 in July commemorating the Wimbledon Champion Dorothea Lambert Chambers. This was her home between 1887 and 1907, during which time she developed her love of tennis and won the first three of her Wimbledon Ladies Singles Championships. She went on to become Britain's most successful tennis player with eleven Wimbledon titles (7 singles, 2 doubles, and 2 mixed doubles), an Olympic gold medal in 1908 and over 200 career titles. The unveiling ceremony also paid homage to two other Ealing Lawn Tennis Club contemporaries of Dorothea's: Blanch Bingley and Charlotte Cooper. Between 1884 and 1919 these three Ealing women won 18 Wimbledon singles titles.

Dorothea's final achievement was her victory in the deciding rubber of the Wightman Cup in 1925 at the age of 46.

*Margaret Gold*

### **The South Bank Wurlitzer**

We are supporting a proposal by the Cinema Organ Society to Ealing Council to install their South Bank Wurlitzer Organ behind the stage of the Victoria Hall in the Town Hall in the space formerly occupied by a large 4-manual concert organ from 1901-1956. The South Bank Wurlitzer was originally built in the early 1930s for the Trocadero Cinema at Elephant & Castle. It was and still is the largest Wurlitzer Organ to have been exported from the USA. It has 24 ranks, compared with 15 ranks in the Compton Cinema Organ at the Odeon Leicester Square, and has recently been restored and put into storage at the request of the South Bank University who urgently needed the space which it occupied at its last "home" in their Edridge Hall in South London. Ealing Council are considering the proposal, although the organ would continue to be owned and maintained by the COS. The organ could be used for a wide variety of events in the Victoria Hall from concerts to weddings and speech days. If the proposal is approved (and this is still a big "if" at present!) it is believed by some of the experts at the COS that the combination of this fine organ with the good dance floor and acoustic in the Victoria Hall (it has a 3-4 second echo), would provide Ealing with one of the finest settings for a cinema/theatre organ in Europe. It could then reasonably be re-named as "The Ealing Wurlitzer" and would provide another reason for Ealing's fame besides being known as 'The Queen of the suburbs', for its film studios, the Questors' Theatre and the end of the District and Central lines!

*Mike Tiley*

### **Licensing Update**

Since our last newsletter a flood of applications has been received by Ealing Council from licensed premises wishing to extend their opening hours for the sale of

alcohol and for the provision of what is often referred to as regulated entertainment. At the same time some have asked that any restrictions imposed under the terms of the previous licensing acts be lifted. Whether the timing for the submission of these applications during the summer months is fortuitous or planned is a moot point. The result has been that a number of individuals who might have objected to this further expansion of the night-time economy have been away and Ealing Council has been faced with a significant administrative burden. Ealing Civic Society has worked with the Council in the development of a Special Area Policy applicable to the Central Ealing Zone. The policy clearly states that the Council will "generally refuse applications for new premises licenses or club premises certificates or for material variation for premises within the Central Ealing Zone". But the Council can only act if proper representations are made. To this end we have objected to 23 applications representing those from premises within the central zone including some from premises in the periphery. Thus the stage was set for the Council to consider these applications at properly constituted hearings at which the rights of local residents could be heard. However, Ealing Council has been unable to deal with the many applications within the 28 days allowed by the Licensing Act 2003 thus giving the applicants the right to refer the matter to the magistrate's court. To date two of the 23 applicants have referred their applications to the courts and not surprisingly have not informed the objectors of this action. It is possible that some or even all of the current applicants may be in a position to exercise the same right which raises the question of whether residents are having a fair hearing.

*Jim McLaughlin*

Acton History Group invites Ealing Civic Society members to its meeting on Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> February 2006, at St Mary's Church Hall, Acton at 7.30pm for a talk on Bedford House, Acton (home of John Lindley).