



Sopwell Residents Association

NEWSLETTER

For all residents of Sopwell

Issue 19
Autumn 2011

From your editor

I understand from one of our local District Councillors, David Poor, that Sopwell is becoming an attractive area for young professionals to settle. And this is altering the demographic profile of the area. We are becoming yuppified! Well, we have always known that Sopwell is the most beautiful part of St Albans so it comes as no surprise that people choose to live here. If you are new to Sopwell, may I extend a warm welcome. I hope you enjoy reading this newsletter and that you will take a look at our website from time to time.

Following my resignation at the AGM this year, we have a new Chair, Rick Taylor. Rick has been a member of the committee for many years and I am sure he will be an able leader. We also have a new Treasurer, Rob Sharman since Mark James resigned. Thanks to Mark for keeping us afloat financially. Unfortunately no-one has stepped forward to take on the Secretary's role since Peter Segers stepped down so I have had to take it on AGAIN!!! I hope this will be temporary.

Larks was very successful this year. We have two reports from those involved. The SRA plant stall, run by Len Lewsey, did very well and we made over £40 for Mandaid. There was a lot of interest in our history stall as well. Many useful contacts were made.

Enjoy the rest of the summer.

Sandy Norman

Autumn walk 17th September

The date for our annual autumn walk is set for 17th September starting at 2pm. We will meet at the Nunnery by the seats. This will once again be a history walk but with some archaeology and environmental information thrown in. Councillor Eileen Harris and the city archaeologist, Simon West, will be our walk leaders. It shouldn't last longer than a couple of hours and will be a gentle walk. All welcome.

Report of Annual General Meeting 17th May

I am very honoured to introduce myself as the new Chairman of the Sopwell Residents Association. Above all, and on behalf of all the residents, I must thank my predecessors, not least Sandy Norman, who have recently relinquished office, for their unflinching hard work and effectiveness.

A pleasing number of residents turned up at our AGM at the Marlborough Pavilion and we were even joined by our local community policeman. It was also reassuring to see so many considering that, unfortunately and uniquely, the original date which was published in the last newsletter had changed. Although it was the date the committee had agreed, we were unable to book the Marlborough Pavilion. This meant that many newsletters went out with the wrong date, with those that had not been distributed early having to be altered. Sandy apologised and thanked the deliverers who had had to do the editing before delivering.

The high points of the AGM were:

- The comprehensive annual report compiled and presented by our then Secretary, Peter Segers. It is amazing what has been achieved in the past year - the Nunnery boardwalk and path, the Abbots Avenue improvements, and the noticeboards to name but a few. A copy of the annual report has been uploaded onto our website so please have a look.
- The update by Amanda Godfrey, the Head Teacher of Mandeville School, on the state of play of the school extension which should be finished by the end of the school holidays. She praised the work of those who are helping to fund the shortfall in the costs as well as apologising for the mess made by the contractors in the streets nearby.

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If you live in Sopwell, you are automatically a member of SRA. There is no charge to join and events are free.

Contact details

23 Tavistock Avenue
St Albans AL1 2NQ

info@sopwell.org.uk
www.sopwell.org.uk

- The presentation by Sandy Norman which was a very interesting and entertaining taster of her forthcoming publication on the history of Sopwell. This engendered many questions and suggestions and we all look forward to reading it when it is published.
- The wonderful cakes provided by Ananda Armstrong-King. Thanks Ananda.

The low points were the resignation of:

- Sandy Norman as Chair
- Peter Segers as Secretary
- Mark James as Treasurer

Sandy, Peter and Mark have agreed to stay on the committee. However, this does highlight the need for more willing residents to join the committee and to play an active role. For too long, the same people have done the majority of the work and we need others with the same commitment and enthusiasm. Sandy, for example, has been active on the committee as Secretary and then as Chair since the SRA began in 2003. She, especially, deserves a rest.

Rick Taylor

Ramsbury Road Big Lunch and Open Gardens Day 5th June 2011

Ramsbury Road held its second annual Big Lunch on June 5th, once again tied in with fund-raising for the Odyssey Cinema. A communal picnic lunch was held in the road, after which James Hannaway "opened" the road for an Open Gardens event. In spite of the first rainy day for a couple of months a good time was had by all (luckily anyone interested in gardens was happy to have a bit of rain!) We've now sponsored one seat and are on our way to a second. Next year's Big Lunch is due to take place during the Diamond Jubilee celebrations, so we're already thinking about that one.

Anne Wares

Launch of Fenny's Boardwalk, the river path and leaflet

It seems a long time ago now but last March, the boardwalk and path in the Nunnery open space were officially opened by the mayor, Councillor Maxine Crawley who jointly cut the ribbon with SRA's Sandy Norman. We were blessed with a gloriously sunny spring day, so quite a few people attended the event and there was a really nice atmosphere, with people chatting away. There is a little photo album of the event, including the moment when Sandy and the Mayor – eventually! – managed to cut through the ribbon on our new Sopwell Nunnery blog which can be accessed via the website. Cutting a ribbon is not as easy as you might think! CMS and SADC also produced a brand new leaflet for the Sopwell Nunnery Green Space, providing details of the site's history, natural environment and wildlife that might be seen. The first copies were handed out at the boardwalk launch event. The leaflet is available for download from the SADC website and printed copies should be available from the Tourist Information Centre. However Sandy has a boxful of them if anyone wants a copy.....

Peter Segers

Herts Hike for Oxfam 24th September

Join the Oxfam St Albans group for their annual Herts Hike series of walks - ranging from 3 to 19 miles - all starting and finishing in Sandridge. All routes are waymarked and there are marshals on hand plus free refreshments on your return! Come and enjoy some of Hertfordshire's most lovely countryside and help raise funds for Oxfam's work in Thailand at the same time. There is no registration fee, but you are encouraged to enrol online at www.oxfamstalbans.org and you can either get sponsored or make a donation on the day. For more info please email: hertshike@gmail.com or ring 01727 869775/837229

Larks in the Parks

Larks in the Parks took place on the 26th June in and around the Marlborough Pavilion. Organised by Mandeville Primary School in conjunction with Leisure connection, a variety of acts presented music and magic, and offered workshops in circus skills, sports multi-skills and archery. Mandeville School provided a variety of seaside themed stalls for young and old, and a fabulous refreshment tent. It was great to see that a large cross-section of the community came out to join in. We counted between 350-400 people at any time which was a great success.

Funds raised on the day will go towards the new building project at Mandeville School and benefit the local community.

If you would like to get involved in Larks in the Parks next year, please contact the SRA or email larks@sopwell.org.uk

Christoph Lutz

A view from a Larks stallholder

Since June 2009 there had not been a “Larks in the Parks” fun day at the Marlborough Pavilion so 2011 was an opportunity to revitalise this much loved local event. This year it was decided to raise funds for Mandeville School and staff and parents alike stepped in to organise it.

There were lots of different stalls aimed at a range of ages so that all members of families could join in. A variety of sports including archery were on offer and wandering round the field by the pavilion, you could try your hand at finding sandpit “treasure” by unearthing three stars from the sand to get a prize. Placing an “x” on a treasure map with the nearest spot winning the “treasure”, in this case, a bucket of goodies. Face painting, wet sponge throwing, lucky dips and many other stalls selling books, clothes, plants and bric-a-brac were there to keep the pennies coming in.

Outdoor events need good weather and we certainly got that! June the 26th was one of the hottest days of the year up to that time and families came armed with picnics, chairs to relax and sunbathe in and stayed to spend lots of cash!

Accompanying the visitors was a live band with father and daughter members who sang a wide repertoire of songs involving the crowds especially the children, creating a lovely friendly atmosphere throughout the day. In-between their act, Mandeville school choir showcased their vocal talents winning excellent applause all round.

For my part I ran a pom-pom making and weaving stall. Lots of visitors, young and old visited the site and tried their hand at making different sizes of pom-poms, winding multi-stranded and coloured wools between cut out cardboard circles. The youngest members of families who could not co-ordinate their fingers just handled the bright colours, others settled down and became immersed in concentration to carefully wind the wools, taking care to go through the central hole. Many of the parents and grandparents accompanying the children, reminisced how they too, in their childhood, had done the same and delighted in helping out the younger generation as and when they got stuck or needed further advice. Many pom-poms were completed on the day and those who could not finish before time was up were able to take the wools and instructions away to complete their pom-poms at home.

There was also the opportunity to try out tapestry weaving on frames. Several older boys tried their hand at this. It involved weaving different strands of textured threads through upright strings known as the “warp”, and then weaving horizontal threads in and out of the warp to form the “weft”. All completed small squares of woven material, using tools such as polished wooden bobbins and metal beaters which compacted the threads they had already woven. Many were surprised to learn that what they had done was exactly the same as weavers in the medieval period who, using the same techniques and materials, created large and elaborate woven tapestries for the “Beckhams” of their day, which can still be seen in castles and historic houses today.

All in all the day was very successful in giving the local community a chance of a thoroughly enjoyable and entertaining day out, situated on their doorstep, as well as helping to raise much needed funds for Mandeville School.

Ananda Armstrong-King

Sopwell history project

As most of you know, the Sopwell project has been gathering momentum and many local memories and photographs have been collected over the past year or so. So far more than twenty people have come forward to share their memories - some more than once - about what Sopwell and life was like before the estates were built. Also, I have visited and recorded those parts of Sopwell rarely seen by the general public. It is even more beautiful than I thought! The project has now gone beyond the original idea of producing a few leaflets and putting information on the website. There is so much material now that we have decided it should be turned into a book.

There have been numerous publications about the history of St Albans but they have included very little about the Sopwell area, apart from the Nunnery ruins and St Stephen’s Church – indeed many people outside the area believe that “Sopwell” means the Sopwell House Hotel! I have tried, therefore, to put this right and to cover everything that is memorable and interesting about Sopwell and its people. Much of the information is based on the colourful recollections which I have collected from residents and also past residents. I have tried to include topics which have had very little written about them and many that have never been recorded.

The book is to be called *Sopwell: a history and collection of memories* and it is almost ready for publication. However, so far I have been unable to find a publisher willing to take it on so it may have to be self-published. This obviously costs a fair amount especially as I have at least 60 photos both black and white and colour. We have some funding for this but we will need to obtain more if we go down this route. Suggestions on overcoming this problem will be gratefully received as well as any more memories. Please send them to info@sopwell.org.uk or phone 865061.

It has been a very exciting project to undertake. When the book is published, I hope you will enjoy reading it as much as I have enjoyed writing and compiling it.

Sandy Norman

Good neighbours scheme

St Albans Good Neighbour Scheme is a registered charity of about 150 local volunteers of all ages, occupations and backgrounds, providing help in a variety of ways to St Albans district residents if they are elderly, unwell, disabled or facing a crisis, and do not have close family or a 'good neighbour' to turn to. It is a scheme which is very popular with and much appreciated by those who use it and SAGNS volunteers find their own involvement both interesting and rewarding. Whether you can offer only a couple of hours' volunteer work now and then or a couple of days a week, you can make a real difference to someone's life. We are usually able to carry out about 1600 jobs a year.

Since its foundation in 1980 the Scheme has prided itself on providing a service 365 days a year. We are always on the look out for more willing helpers in order to maintain this level of commitment and service. New volunteers to our transport, befriending and 'practical help' sections would also be welcome and are always needed. Except for the transport section, volunteers do not have to be car drivers.

Duty Officers take it in turns, usually one day a month, working from their own homes, covering the Helpline from 9am to 4pm and matching requests for help to available volunteers. Some of the existing Duty Officers are themselves elderly or disabled and this type of volunteering may well provide someone who is on their own with a welcome level of social contact and involvement, whilst also giving something back to the local community. A DO can specify which days of the week or weekend they would be available or choose a particular day if that is more convenient. A friendly telephone manner and a desire to help others are the only qualifications needed. Any training or necessary assistance is provided and a telephone call allowance is available.

SAGNS drivers often take clients to GP or hospital appointments, or just to visit a friend, relative or "lunch club". A mileage allowance is available. Volunteers may also pick up a prescription, help with shopping, befriend a housebound or lonely person, or provide practical help around the house or garden.

With an ever increasing call on our services, new volunteers really are needed in 2011. If you would like to know more about the St Albans Good Neighbour Scheme and how to join us, you can find additional information on the SAGNS website at www.sagns.org or by telephoning our helpline on 830713.

Did you know?

- There used to be an open-air swimming pool on the land now occupied by Albeny Gate. It belonged to St Albans school and was on the edge of their playing fields below Belmont Hill.
- There used to be a Sunday school in the 1940s which was held in what was the butcher's shop in Vesta Avenue. It later moved to the alleyway at the end of Tavistock Avenue.
- There is now an interpretation board on the Alban Way about the old railway line to Hatfield.
- There is a new group set up called Friends of Sopwell Nunnery which, with help from Countryside Management Service and SADC, will manage the Nunnery open space. Please contact info@sopwell.org.uk if you would like to join. The Nunnery Open Space has retained its Green Flag status for another year which is excellent news.
- The planters in Abbots Avenue West by the shops were entered into the St Albans in Bloom competition. We need more volunteers to keep them looking good though.....?

Useful Contacts for Sopwell Residents

Councillor Eileen Harris: 831611 Councillor eileenharris555@btinternet.com

Councillor David Poor: 833670 David.Poor@btinternet.com

Councillor Roger Axworthy: 812681 rla@notmhs.fsnet.co.uk

County Councillor Martin Frearson 761878: mfrearson@ntlworld.com

Litter fly-tipping, graffiti: 0845 1258000 or a.cleanerdistrict@stalbans.gov.uk

Faulty road or pavement surface: 01438 737320 or www.hertsdirect.org/highwayfaults

Next issue

The next issue will be out in the spring of 2012. If you have any items for inclusion or you wish to advertise please go to the website and leave a message. Advertisement charges: £50 for half a page and £25 for a quarter page.