Neighbourhood News

from the Bell Tower Community Association

Issue 4 - June 2006



Come to the quiz

Bell Tower Community Association is pleased to announce a fun quiz evening.

The quiz will take place at New Hope on Friday June 23, starting at 7.30pm.

Join us for a fun evening of questions (serious, funny, words, pictures....)

Admission is £2 for existing BTCA members, £3 for non-members, and non-members are welcome to join the Association on the night at no extra charge. Tickets are available in advance from Barbara at 77 Addison Road.

A fish and chip supper or a vegetarian alternative will be available for £3.50 and tea, coffee and soft drinks will be provided at nominal prices.

Medals will be awarded to the winning teams, and there will be some great prizes donated by local businesses.

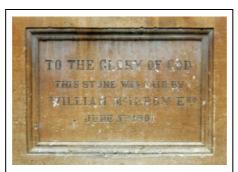
See you there!

Visit the Mayor's Parlour with us!

Come and take afternoon tea with Reading's new mayor - our own ward councillor Bet Tickner.

The event will take place at the Civic Centre on Tuesday June 6 from 6.30 to 7.30pm. Visitors will have the opportunity to see the Council Chamber and view the Civic Plate.

Numbers are limited, so please book your place by Thursday June 1 by contacting Barbara at 77 Addison Road.



EVERY STONE HAS A STORY: Turn over for some fascinating history!

JOIN US NOW

for only £1 per person per year. We already have around 50 members - and hope to see you at our events! Don't forget members can claim some great discounts from local businesses:

- Fan-c-Lights and Koltrane Lighting - up to 25%
- Jay's Barber Shop 10%
- Drews great discounts on cash purchases
- Papa Gee's 10%
- Standard Tandoori 10% on takeaways, 15% on eat-in meals
- More to follow!

Non-members can join for no extra charge at our quiz night, or you can join by contacting Barbara at 77 Addison Road.

News in brief

- Look out for the yellow BTCA signs in the committee members' windows. Please contact any committee member if you have any comments or suggestions for events or activities - we would very much like to hear from you!
- The campaign for red light cameras at the crossing in Caversham Road continues - so far there have been plenty of signatures to the petition. If you would like to support the campaign please contact Christine at 2 Newport Road.
- Reading Borough Council has prepared a consultation draft planning and design brief for the land between Station Hill and Friar Street. If you would like to comment on these documents they are available at libraries and the Planning Reception at the Civic Centre. Or you can meet the Planning Officers in the Kennet Room, Civic Centre, on Thursday May 25 between 4.00 and 8.00pm. The deadline for written comments is Tuesday June 20 - so please use this opportunity to make your views known!

Continued overleaf



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Remember St Paul's church?

New Hope's predecessor had a long and varied history...

All that remains now of the old St Paul's church which stood at the corner of Newport Road and York Road is the foundation stone. The stone commemorates William McIlroy, who in 1897 defrayed the cost of a preaching station on the site, which became part of the Presbyterian Church of England a year later. McIlroy was able to be so generous because he owned a large shop in the building opposite what is now Broad Street Mall. By 1901 the premises had become inadequate, and McIlroy donated the land on which the church was built. It opened on 9 April 1902 as Caversham Road Presbyterian Church, and the preaching station became the church hall. In 1915 it was decided to change the church's name to St Paul's.

From its inception St Paul's emphasised its links with the community. During his tenure its first minister was highly successful, doubling the number communicant members to 228, the highest in its history, by 1907. The church also had 200 pupils in its Sunday school and was forced to operate two sessions. By 1906 its activities included a men's social club, a sick benefit society, youth bible classes and a women's guild. As well as McIlroy himself, it also counted Councillor E P Collier among its members.

The church continued to focus on missionary work until the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. Like the rest of the country, most families in the congregation were affected and many were bereaved. months into the war, it was decided to write out the names of the men serving in the forces in a permanent manner and display them in the church vestibule. This became the church's war memorial and this is now in E P Collier School.

The 1920s were turbulent years for St church, a building English Heritage Paul's. Many of its congregation had left the area and attendances at services dropped from an average 82 in 1920 to 36 in 1929. The situation was not helped by the minister becoming ill and by 1930 becoming unable to participate in the life of the church. The fall in membership and the recession of the 1920s caused a financial crisis, and by 1929 the managers said they were unable to manage the church's budget.

However, a new minister arrived and there was a drive to recruit members from the local area. The tradition of the McIlroy family as benefactors continued, William's son - also called William donating a valuable tapestry of the marriage of Joseph and Mary (this was reportedly stolen from a church in Russia). According to Colin Ferguson, secretary of the church from most of the period from 1984, tapestry was eventually auctioned off in the late 1990s. McIlroy Ir continued to boost the church, paying for a Sunday school outing in 1934 and using the church for civic services for the five years he was mayor of Reading from 1938. By 1937 attendances at Communion services had risen to 80. During World War II the church's activities were restricted by the blackout rules, but it continued to focus on youth work and outreach to the local community.

This work went on after the war but, as with other churches, there was a steady decline in attendances and it was becoming increasingly difficult to maintain the building. In the early 1960s the top of the tower had to be taken down, giving the church a truncated look. As early as 1970 the church decided to set up a committee to look into moving to a new site or redeveloping the present one. However, a referendum of the membership revealed that 76% thought St Paul's should continue in its existing premises, and a lack of funds prevented plans for new premises on the site.

From 1996 the church had no fulltime minister, and attendances had dwindled to 25-30 people. The church hall became condemned due to dry rot and dangerous electrical The repair bill for the

described as being of no significant architectural interest, would have been around £1 million. The United Reformed Church, into which the English Presbyterian church had merged, decided it was better to sell the site and use the proceeds to renew other URC premises.

The one part of the church that was listed was the organ, which was removed before demolition and is now in Malta. The foundation stone was kept and split; its back half was inscribed with the text from St Paul's letter to the Romans and was also included in the New Hope building, as a symbol of continuing Christian worship on the site.

Acknowledgement: A History of St Paul's Church by Alec Watson

News in brief - continued

- Because of the mess left by swans near the rowing club on the Thames Promenade, experimental fencing has been put up in the area. Residents are asked not to feed the swans, to discourage them from trying to get out of the water.
- We have been advised that free safety checks on electric blankets and small electrical appliances will be held soon, probably at the fire station in Caversham Road. If you would like further information please leave your name and address or phone number with Barbara at 77 Addison Road.
- Nurturing a Healthy Self-Esteem, an evening for ladies only, will be held on Tuesday June 27 at 7.45pm at New Hope (details from Kath Cooke 0118 951 2933). And look out for New Hope's Community Barbecue on Sunday July 16!
- ABS Printing would like to thank everyone who has donated used postage stamps for the Harefield Heart Hospital. Please keep them coming! And E P Collier's Yellow Pages collection has had a great response.
- Finally, please remember E P Collier School when you receive school vouchers from Tesco, Sainsbury's and other supermarkets. These help the school obtain valuable equipment.





Neighbourhood News is kindly sponsored by grants from the Berkshire Community Foundation and Reading Borough Council.