

The Bury St Edmunds Society

25 Years of Campaigning for a Better Bury



St John's Street - where the Society began

25th Anniversary
May 1996



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The Bury Society began life in October 1971. Since that time, it has become an efficient and well-respected organisation

Foundation

The Society was founded in October 1971 and is a registered charity affiliated to the Civic Trust. Its registered charity number is 263230. It is the only such society nationally represented on the Historic Towns Forum.

Constitution

The Society is established for the public benefit for the following purposes in the area of Bury St Edmunds:

- to stimulate public interest in the area
- to promote high standards of planning and architecture in the area
- to secure the preservation, protection, development and improvement of features of historic or public interest in the area.

Organisation

The Executive Committee controls all the principal work of the Society and comprises the Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Hon. Secretary, Hon. Treasurer, Planning Officer, Programme Secretary, Membership Secretary and between seven and twelve committee members. All members of the Executive Committee are also members of the Planning Committee.

The Planning Committee considers all new or revised plans submitted to the Borough Council and makes recommendations on them for the consideration of the Council. It also considers matters such as traffic management and the Local Plan and its representatives provide

evidence at public enquiries where appropriate. Sub-Committees of the Executive Committee are formed to consider particular matters and demonstrate the wider purpose of the Society. At present the following are active:

Architectural Awards

Awards may be made annually for excellence in architecture for the restoration of old or for the design of new buildings. Plaques are offered in recognition and can be seen on such varied buildings as the Abbey Gardens lavatory, William Barnaby yard and Parkway House (Suffolk Housing Association).

Bury in Bloom

This started as an idea of the Bury Society and its finances pass through a sub-account of the Society.

Crime Prevention

The Society is represented on the town's Crime Prevention Panel.

Finance

The Sub-Committee monitors the Society's income, expenditure and investments.

Anti-Litter

The Society is represented on the Town's Anti-Litter Panel and has a long-standing and active sub-committee.



Planting a tree in Abbey Gardens to commemorate the Society's 25th anniversary

Traffic

Many of the town's problems are caused by traffic, whether by large goods vehicles in the town centre or by car parking. A keen interest in traffic management is maintained by the Society.

Great Churchyard

This is a unique town centre feature and contains or is surrounded by many listed buildings and monuments. In partnership with the Borough Council, the Society has helped to enhance this area.

Funding

The Society has been funded largely by members' subscriptions. But in January 1987 Dr Alison Rac, former Deputy Medical Officer of Health for West Suffolk, died and left nearly £250,000 for the benefit of the town and its people. This sum was divided equally between three groups in the town including the Bury St Edmund's Society. As a result, the Society has been able to support various works, including:

- Unitarian Meeting House £20,000
- St John's Centre £15,000
- Churchyard seats £4,000
- Gateway at St Louis £1,165
- Chequer Square obelisk £480
- River Linnet project £170

During the Cattle Market enquiry £2,350 was spent on professional fees. The total spent to date on benefit to the town is over £43,000.

After adding interest, the bequest account is just under £100,000 and this will help the Society to support other worthwhile schemes.

Publications

The Society's Newsletter is published several times a year and a very successful booklet 'A Walkabout Bury St Edmunds' has been revised and re-printed over a number of years. The Society in partnership with the Borough Council has published a leaflet demonstrating good practice in the design of windows and doors in the conservation area.

Current Key Interests

These include the results of the public enquiry into the Local Plan, the future of the Cattle Market site, the multitude of problems caused by increasing traffic and routine matters of planning applications.

Forthcoming Events

The Society celebrates its 25th year in 1996 with the donation of a beech tree for the Cloister Garden, the tenth anniversary of Bury in Bloom, the Historic Town Forum hosted in Bury St Edmunds, a stall at Nowton Park Open Day in June, a Heritage Day in conjunction with the Civic Trust, proposed new blue plaques, a Summer Garden party, a commemorative booklet and shorter publications.

It is hoped that the general public as well as members themselves will join in many of these activities.

Origins of the Society

In 1981, when the Society celebrated its tenth anniversary, Mrs Barbara Rampling gave the following address at a reception held in the Athenaeum. It is worth re-printing today:

Most of you will remember that, in the early part of 1971, there was a gathering storm of protest in Bury about the Council's support for plans to demolish part of St John's Street for the new town centre shopping development. The whole plan was utterly repugnant. Apart from being ugly and out-of-scale, it involved the destruction of well-established small businesses.

Lady Playfair was in the centre of the protest. She called a great meeting in the Corn Exchange attended by several hundred people on 22 June 1971. We all made speeches and expressed our rage at the attitude of our elected representatives. A message expressing our condemnation was drafted and sent from the meeting to the Council.

As the meeting closed and we broke up, I asked a group of friends at the back of the hall - 'Is there not some way in which public opinion can be brought to bear in the early stages of planning proposals to avoid these eleventh-hour rescue dramas?' (You must remember that the Corn Exchange itself had had to be rescued from decline in similar circumstances). Jane Dartford was in the group and she said: 'Of course, but Bury must have an amenity society and you must start it, Barbara' The others all agreed that this was a splendid idea and I realised that I had been let in for a considerable job of work.

Original Members

The group concerned were Mrs Audrey Cardale, Brigadier and Mrs Collett-White, Mrs McLean Luis, Mrs Jane Dartford and my husband and myself. We decided to meet within a few days to discuss the project and the result was the formation of a Steering Committee with Pat Luis as Chairman and myself as Secretary. We agreed to ask others to join us, including Jean Patterson. Some did not wish to join the

Committee but nevertheless were extremely helpful in other ways and are still active in the Society today.

Having established our Steering Committee, we were still very vague about the function of the amenity society and what its constitution should be. We knew that Norwich had a successful watch-dog organisation so Jane and I were sent to Norwich to find out about it.

Start at City Hall

We decided to start at the City Hall and made for the Planning Department. We must have chosen the right day because, having made our problems known to the receptionist, we found ourselves being ushered into the 'holy of holies' to meet all the 'top-brass' including the Chief Planning Officer and the City Architect (David Percival) who arranged our introduction to Jean Ogden, Organising Secretary to the Norwich Society. Later in recognition of his kindness and help, we chose David Percival as our main speaker at the inaugural meeting.

The summer of '71 was spent in endless correspondence and telephoning. The Civic Trust were extremely helpful with the business side of the organisation. The Charity Commissioners' requirements were rather complicated but we got it all sorted out in the end. Brian Weller, who at the time was Secretary of the Eastern Federation of Amenity Societies, gave us sound advice on policy. He was able to point out the pitfalls which had caused some societies to fold up within a short time of starting. The Secretary to the Suffolk Preservation Society at the time was Mr Field-Reid and he gave us much fatherly help. All our supporters were as keen as we were that we should get off to a good start.

Sending out Invitations

Lady Playfair would not join us. She said that she preferred to be an activist rather than an organiser. Nevertheless, she was full of ideas and rang me up two or three times a week. Above all, Jean Ogden and the Norwich Society were super helpful. Their advice on the relationships between the amenity society, the planners and the Council was invaluable. We

had to get it all right without causing antagonism and yet we must establish our authority and integrity.

So, with our aims now fairly clear, we sent out invitations to about 60 people whom we thought likely to be interested and on Friday, 3 September, we sounded them out at a meeting in the Athenaeum lounge. Norman Scarfe was our speaker and we were given the go-ahead to call the inaugural meeting.

We were told that the general system was to title amenity societies by the name of the place they serve plus the word 'society'. We had been calling ourselves 'The Bury St Edmunds Civic Trust Society' and this became simply 'The Bury St Edmunds Society'.

The Objects

The objects were to be:

1. To encourage high standards of architecture and planning in Bury St Edmunds;
2. To stimulate public interest in, and care for, the beauty, history and character of the area of the town and its surroundings;
3. To encourage the preservation, development and improvement of features of general public or historic interest;
4. To pursue these ends by means of meetings, exhibitions, lectures, publications and other forms of instruction and publicity.

Membership was to be open to all and the subscription was to be 50 pence.

Chairman

We now had sufficient backing to form the Society but one thing was lacking - a Chairman. We needed someone who was non-political, of good local standing, a worker and not just a figure-head and, above all, someone who understood the needs of an ancient town under severe pressure. The Steering Committee was certain about whom we wanted but he was a very busy man who spent many of his evenings lecturing; and we knew that, if he agreed, he

would be making a considerable sacrifice. However, very diffidently, we approached him and he was willing! So, David Dymond became our first Chairman and, with him, the Society was complete.

We booked the Corn Exchange for our inaugural meeting and launched the Society on 1 October 1971. New members were elected to the Committee at this meeting including Richard Hannay, who was a student of landscape architecture at Cambridge University and who put in a lot of work in a study of the amenities of Bury's rivers.

The early days of the Bury Society were never uneventful. Mr James Gorst and Mr Brian Musgrave of the East Suffolk County Council's Planning Department were always helpful to Brigadier Collett-White who was our Planning Representative at that time. Certain members of the Borough Council welcomed our foundation, notably councillors Rosa Smith, Harry Marsh, Susan Hayes (now Tamlyn) and Fearnley Jepson. Others warmed to us as time went on whilst some have always regarded us with suspicion and even irritation.

Relations with the Press

Relations with the Press were an area of some delicacy. We were warned that, strange though it may seem, amenity societies were not popular with the press and that the only publicity we were likely to get would be via paid advertising. So we decided to have a specific policy of wooing local editors. I am glad to say that The East Anglian Daily Times, in the form of Robin Williams, was most sympathetic from the start and has been ever since. Though the Bury Free Press is a good friend now, this was not always so. In our early days, they were quite unwilling to believe that our aims were to benefit the town; and they attacked us as objectors to progress and were most hostile.

Ten years has given the Bury Society time to become known and appreciated for what it is. We have made achievements and had failures but, looking back over the decade, I think that the organisation that we created and the aims and objects that we set, have served the need well.

Twenty Years of Chairmen



*Back Row from left to right:
David Dymond, Jos Bird, David Chrispin, Fearnley Jepson (Mayor), Martin Lightfoot, Gerald Travers
Front Row: John Clibbon, Susan Tamlyn, Mike Ames, Peter Plumridge*

Chairmen Remember

Over the 25 years, the Society has had ten Chairmen. We asked them all to reflect on their terms of office

David Dymond (1971-73)

In 1971, I was privileged to be elected the first and founding chairman of the Bury Society. It therefore gives me immense pleasure to send my warmest congratulations to the Society and to all its members and officers, past and present, on the achievement of the first quarter-century.

It is heartening to know that the initiative which

we started rather nervously in 1971 has not only survived but has grown and secured a respected and permanent place in the life of the town.

I find it difficult to accept that it all started as long as twenty-five years ago but my grey hairs and faltering memory should convince me of the truth. However, I do remember two events quite clearly. At the first meeting of the steering committee, I encountered all the other

conspirators who wished to found a permanent amenity society for Bury. For some reason, we met in the improbable and perhaps unsuitable surroundings of the Masonic Hall. It is interesting that several of us then lived in places like Stanton, Rushbrooke and Sicklesmere. At the time, this drew criticism which showed a profound misunderstanding of Bury's role as the natural hub of western Suffolk.

History should certainly record that the leading figures were two far-sighted, able and determined women, Barbara Rampling and Lady Kate Playfair, and that we received much practical help from our colleagues in the Norwich Society.

To me as chairman, our public launch in the newly-remodelled Corn Exchange was nerve-wracking but exciting. The public response was not massive but was sufficient in numbers and commitment to encourage us to go ahead. There then followed a regular pattern which is familiar to all amenity and environmental organizations of meetings, discussions, site-visits, letters to the press, consultations with planners and so on.

My sincere hope is that the Society will continue to grow and attract members from all sections of the community, that it will embark on a vigorous publishing policy and that it will fearlessly tackle important local issues whenever and wherever they arise. In these days of political disenchantment, amenity societies provide another vital way in which we can debate, publicize and wrestle with difficult concepts like taste, scale, change, continuity, restoration, development and regional identity.

Long may the Society thrive, into the twenty-first century and beyond! Bury certainly needs it, when you consider the mistakes of the past and the huge pressures of a fast-changing and shrinking world.

Jos Bird (1973-76)

During my period as chairman, we were very much in the early stages of the Society's growth. We had no money, no premises, no administrative set-up.

During this period, the one great issue was the

nature and extent of the Moreton Hall development and the need to ensure that the green view eastwards from Abbeygate Street was retained. That battle involved television interviews and an important letter to *The Times*. We feel, as can be seen, that we were successful.

David Chrispin (1976-77)

When I became Chairman in 1976, I inherited a very going concern following David Dymond and Jos Bird.

My immediate aim was to find an appropriate project to commemorate the Queen's Silver Jubilee in 1977. Co-incidentally, Hugh Thomas, former vice-chairman and architect, had a vision from his office window for an improved Traverse by narrowing the road with paving stones, planting trees and providing seating for shoppers. It was decided to put forward this plan to the Public Meeting convened by the Mayor and representatives of the Queen's Silver Jubilee Committee. Being the only idea, it was supported unanimously!

The project was to be financed privately with appeals by leaflet to industry, local traders and all likely donors. The money rolled in and so the Traverse was transformed with a commemorative plaque inserted in the paving. It is to be regretted that the seats were subsequently removed because of their use by 'yobbos' who used to sit on the steps and the surrounds of the Corn Exchange (now the seats on the Cornhill have been removed for the same incredible reason). 'Thou shalt not sit!' Also, the chosen double red thorn trees were encouraged to die in order to be replaced by a characterless London plane tree when the Traverse was completely paved over a few years ago.

The next major project for the Society that year was the Public Enquiry on the rebuilding of the Eastgate bridge. Imagine concrete sides for the river Lark extending through the Abbot's Bridge and Abbey Gardens! The plan luckily was dropped.

Other topics of interest that year were the development of Butts corner, the need for a

permanent gypsy site, the lack of facilities for tourists to the town on Sundays and the everlasting discussion of town centre pedestrianisation.

In the Great Churchyard, the charnal house's 19th century railings were repaired at the Society's insistence when it transpired that the plan was to remove them permanently. Nearby the statue of St Edmund by Elizabeth Frinck was unveiled in a significant position recommended by the Society where it could be seen from Churchgate Street, through the Norman archway and in direct line with the entrance and high altar of the Abbey.

The Society asked Miss Frinck to describe how she came to conceive her work of art. This was her reply: 'It is always very difficult to put into words what one is attempting to portray in a work of art. Mainly it should be interesting enough for people to work out something in it for themselves - something that will make them stop for a minute and wonder. In this case, it is a straight-forward interpretation of what I feel that St Edmund may have looked like. Nobody does know but there are one or two descriptions such as that he was a very young man when he was killed, in his late teens or early twenties, so I have made him youthful in appearance.

'He is also supposed to have been a small man of slight build and with a big nose. There is not much else to go on. I also attempted to make the sculpture rather medieval to go with the cathedral. As one does not know precisely what he would have worn, a simple tunic seemed to be the answer.

'As a sculptress, I do not endeavour much to dress my figures, clothes do date, but simplicity is ageless. A great many carvings of saints in cathedrals are all dressed or draped very simply, some of them with just loin cloths so I have done the same.

'He was a very religious early christian so I added the cross and the crown for his royalty.

'I hope that the people of Bury will come round to appreciate it (the ones that do not at the moment). Unfortunately, the press only print comments by people who do not! They never

think of printing comments from people who really like it. It is sad that in this country appreciation of the arts is so low. On the continent, there is sculpture about everywhere in the cities and it is a normal addition to the surroundings - a part of people's lives.'

Although we were already an enthusiastic society, I was keen to spread the membership to a younger generation and so began the first of many annual buffet parties with dancing to the Chancery Jazz Band. My wife and other committee members organised food for 100 people for which the cost was £33.89!

Finally, it is disappointing to me that the listed Out Westgate Street cottages have never been restored and remain an eyesore in their present state. But let me end on a more positive note - I shall always remember Eileen Backhouse for the enormous effort that she gave the Society.

Martin Lightfoot (1977-1979)

The Queen's Silver Jubilee took place during my time as Chairman. With the idea and promotion of David Chrispin, money was raised by public subscription to pave the south side of The Traverse and to plant two trees - where are they now? I believe Hugh Thomas, the architect and previous vice-chairman of the Society, had looked from his office window and thought how absurd the wide road was adjacent to the Corn Exchange and how well received some public seating could be here. Doubts were raised as to the wisdom of giving the supporters of The Nutshell seats to sit on whilst they imbibed and these certainly in the early years proved justified.

The paved area and seats were opened with a civic ceremony attended by our Member of Parliament - although my personal preference was for Paul Mariner, the then Ipswich striker, to cut the tape.

The great issue as always was Brentgovel Street. We had some years previously seen a pedestrian shopping arcade at the top of the street by the owner of The Odeon Cinema (then the Focus). Then the site was earmarked for a departmental store (Debenham's name was often mentioned) and a big development

planned for the site of The Queen's Head pub, its yard and buildings along with the cinema.

The Queen's Head was attractive but apparently not listed as also adjacent buildings at this end of Brentgovel Street (a left-over from the unlamented St John's redevelopment scheme).

The Whitworth Architect Partnership produced a very attractive scheme, retaining The Queen's Head and improving the buildings in the yard behind, to me a thousand times better both visually - and probably commercially - than the buildings now standing there. For some reason, which I never understood, this alternative scheme was never allowed to be submitted for a planning decision.

Gerald Travers (1979-1982)

It was in 1981 when I received a request from Dr Alison Rae's lawyer to visit her as a representative of The Bury Society.

My trip took me to Manson House, Northgate Street on a bright sunny autumn afternoon, the sort of day when only light clothing is required as the outside temperature was extremely pleasant.

I duly entered Dr Rae's large living room and after introductions settled down to listen why she had requested to see me. It soon transpired that she did not think that she had long to live and wanted to bequeath a donation to a worthy amenity or charity. I immediately launched forth that The Bury Society was a most worthwhile cause (naturally biased!).

After an hour, I began to wilt under the sweltering room temperature (well into the 80's F) but proceeded to outline the many useful schemes where money could be of use. I still had no idea of the amount she intended to donate but thought a sum of perhaps £5,000.

The meeting concluded in a most friendly manner with Dr-Rae appearing satisfied with my 'case' and stating she would re-discuss the issue with her lawyer as soon as possible.

Time went by and to my utter amazement I saw her three years later, in the depth of winter,

striding along Northgate Street in her recognisable bonnet and cape (remembering she could not walk when I visited her and was not expected to last long!)

When Dr Rae finally passed away (another three years later!), the Society received a transcript of the will and details of the legacy. What followed was truly amazing to all, including myself. Alison decided to leave her estate between three local organisations and in 1989 this amounted to a grand total of nearly £260,000.

The Bury Society, through most wise and prudent management, has invested and spent so that although half the original sum has gone, still more than the original remains. Her will stated: 'that it be used for local projects whether of creation or preservation in or near the town centre and further wish (without imposing any binding obligation) that some part be used for planting in the Great Churchyard.'

Now, anyone who has had dealings with the learned legal profession knows the difficulty of translation of any legal document. However, as the person who actually 'listened and negotiated', I can state categorically that Alison Rae quite simply wanted to hand her money over for the town's general benefit - no more, no less.

This, I feel, has so far been admirably achieved though the committees in judgement can be reassured that at no time did she want to put complex restrictions as to the money's use.

Twenty-five years have passed since the Society's formation - who would have dared to think that it could have lasted? It has 'weathered' well and now has the finance for its ambitions to continue.

In conclusion, it is my earnest wish that the Bury Society will continue to commemorate a fine lady's generosity to a town she so clearly loved.

John Clibbon (1982-1984)

I was elected to be the Chairman of the Society as the successor to Gerald Travers. He had given the Society very high profile in the media and had raised public awareness of many issues which were of great concern to us. I wanted to continue what Gerald had started and the Committee worked on various projects trying to publicise the work of the Society. These projects ranged from our own Christmas cards, an exhibition in the Library, a talk on Saxon Radio by Ken Bayley, regular contact with newspapers, debates on the radio, recruitment drives and displays arranged in key town centre spots. Invitations to speak to the Society and to the public were given to and accepted by Ronald Blythe and Alec Clifton-Taylor, among others.

It was very important to seek the active support and help of the general public at this time because of the real concern being felt about the rapidly-changing face of Bury St Edmunds. Greene King had proposals for a new chimney. It is a tribute to the key role which the Society had established in planning terms that Greene King consulted us about possible designs. This was also true of the interest being shown in the town's collection of pictures.

We were active in setting up a working party to resolve the fate of these pictures. It is interesting to note that Cllr Jepson thanked the Society for its suggestion that possibly the Bristol House (now Manor House) could be used as a gallery/museum. The Great Churchyard led to some spirited exchanges between the Council, who had suggested using it as a car-park, and ourselves who have been in the vanguard of the groundswell of public opinion which cries out for the conservation and preservation of trees, open spaces, quality of walkways and pavements and other public amenities. Thanks to our intervention, working parties were set up on The Great Churchyard and litter in the town.

At this time, we made ourselves quite unpopular with the Borough Council. We became a thorn in their side as they turned their minds towards town developments and continued the saga of Brentgovel Street. We did, however, develop a mutually beneficial relationship as they came to

respect us as guardians of the town's heritage and we gained from their more open approach on planning issues. This co-operation was particularly strong during the Risbygate enquiry.

Not surprisingly, as a keen rail enthusiast, my involvement with the early stages of the refurbishment and enhancement of the railway station stands out as a highlight of my chairmanship. On a more poignant note, I remember the day when, together with other town representatives, I planted a tree in a grove to mark the marriage of the Prince and Princess of Wales. In the formation of a Saxon crown on the Moreton Hall estate, oaks were planted for stability and strength and silver birches for flexibility and beauty. These qualities may have eluded the royal pair but they still have meaning for The Bury Society. There, that is something to live up to!

Susan Tamlyn (1984-87)

During 1984, Eileen Backhouse handed over the reins as Planning Officer to Eric Graves after carrying out this arduous function for 13 years. The Society owes her an enormous debt of gratitude for the patience, persistence, energy and humour with which she carried out this mammoth task for so long.

Concern was expressed in the autumn newsletter about the lack of progress on the old Odeon site (now Cornhill Walk), on the old Borough Library (now the Halifax Building Society, Laura Ashley premises), on the state of the Market Cross (now Woolwich Building Society offices) and on the future use of the Manor House.

A sub-committee under chairman Mike Ames gave detailed consideration to the Borough Council's proposals for Traffic and Parking. They recommended that 'the main shopping streets should be rid of on-street parking, that the pedestrianisation of St John's Street was not practical and would require gradual implementation with experimental schemes, eg widening of existing pavements.' (Stet!) And the need for an independent traffic survey.

I reported at the AGM in May that a meeting

had taken place with the Sainsbury architect to discuss the plans for a supermarket on the Moreton Hall estate. I thought the plans were dull and unimaginative and I felt that no effort had been made by the firm to adjust the design to suit the town.

Walking through Notcutt's in Norwich in the autumn of 1985, my eye was caught by an attractive poster advertising Norwich in Bloom. I asked for a copy but was able to purloin one! Very quickly John and Lucy Clibbon produced a Bury version. A sub-committee was formed under the chairmanship of Mandy Ballam, the Borough was approached for support (only moral, not financial, help was forthcoming!) And we decided to proceed on our own. Bill Sewell recruited sponsorship for baskets from local industry, business and trade, we held competitions for a number of categories of decoration and gardens, Radio Saxon gave topical hints on planting and cultivation, an exhibition of floral paintings was held in the Cathedral Cloisters and prizes were awarded at the Gardeners Question Time in July. Thus was launched 'Bury in Bloom'.

Following this success, the event continued in 1986 and, I need hardly say, has gone from strength to strength under the lead and chairmanship of Mike Ames.

Discussion of the draft Local Plan continued. The Society's Planning Committee expressed concern about the deadening effect of pedestrianisation on the town centre after six o'clock. They believed the omission of the Cattle Market site to be a grave mistake and felt that the town was already over-provided with supermarkets. They were concerned at the lack of proposals for a bus station. Councillor Mrs Jennings (now Hill) attended a meeting of the Executive Committee in November. She commented that the issue of decked car parking was the most important one facing the Borough. She agreed to look into criticisms by Mr Woods that the Borough did not exercise its rights sufficiently in protecting ancient buildings in the town.

Socially and educationally, the Society was extremely active. For nearly three weeks in

January 1987 we - or rather John Clibbon - presented an exhibition in the Borough Library, highlighting the draft Local Plan and the under-developed and derelict areas of the Borough. The display attracted a lot of public attention and contributed to the deluge of responses that the Borough Council received.

Under the assiduous and energetic chairmanship of Monica Place (also responsible for the revised walkabout book), the anti-litter sub-committee continued its campaign targeting ('revolting to behold') the area around Gateways and the multiple stores in the Cornhill and Buttermarket area (pre-MacDonalds).

Our September newsletter flagged up our concern over a multiplicity of issues: the erosion of public open space; the need for weight restrictions on lorries entering the town centre; the continued non-development of the offensive Focus Cinema site and of much of Risbygate Street; the continued dereliction of the West Front and of the Unitarian Church; and the Borough Council's continued granting of permission for the change of use from residential to office premises.

Ten years on, it is encouraging that there has been substantial improvement in the latter four items.

The society's views on the plans for the proposed Sainsbury's store were highlighted in an article in the April issue of the Architect's Journal. In spite of local opposition, the Borough Council approved the plans in May 1986. I commented on the £3.5m that Sainsbury's had given to the Borough - some of it might be spent on the West Front of the old Abbey!

Since its inauguration, the Society had supported the retention and restoration of houses in the West Front. The Borough Council continued to drag its feet. The Society wrote to both English Heritage and to the Times. English Heritage replied, urging the Society to continue to exert pressure. At last in March 1987, the Council announced that the first stages of repair would commence. Subsequently, English Heritage invited John Clibbon and I to meet them on their tour of the West Front. This

signalled a major step forward in the restoration of Bury's essential core.

At the same time, the Society approached the Marquis of Bristol to see if he would purchase the Manor House from the County Council for use as a museum. The Marquis outbid the Borough Council at auction but subsequently sold the house to the Borough who have since most magnificently restored it.

The Society launched a scheme to make awards annually for architectural work of outstanding merit for either new buildings or refurbishment of existing buildings. Awards were made at the AGM in 1987 for the railway station, for Bedford's (now Bidwell's) estate agency offices and for Pepper's antique shop.

At the end of my three years as Chairman I drew attention to the Society's initiatives in architectural awards, Bury in Bloom, the Manor House, the West Front of the Abbey and the integration of the cattle market site into the revised Town Plan.

Mike Ames (1987 -1990)

I expect that I am like many members who look forward to and enjoy reading the Society's Newsletters. They have become an excellent means of communicating reports and up-dates from the Executive Committee, besides being an organ for the membership to make comments on or to raise issues concerning Bury St Edmunds.

In fact, it is interesting to thumb through past editions as they reflect on the very life-blood and spirit of the Society over the years of its existence.

I had the honour of being the Chairman for three years. Being in reflective frame of mind, I thought I would pick a few issues which occupied the deliberations of the Society over those years as I believe that some of you might find it interesting either as a seasoned member or a new one.

It has crossed my mind - where has the Society come from, where is it going, is our presence manifest through its influence, can we identify

progress on issues which generate the membership's heartbeat?

Looking back one does notice, how the format of the Newsletter has changed which reflects the Society's character as it gets older. During my term in office, most covers depict a John Clibbon cartoon - all good cartoonists make a political point. I will mention autumn 1987. A cover shows St John's spire with hanging baskets - a reference to the Society's initiative in Bury in Bloom. Spring 1989 depicts 'No Building in No Man's Land - a reference to plans to develop land off Rougham Road whilst the Spring of 1990 issue has a cover saying 'Get it right, gents!' - a reference to the Council selecting the developer for the cattle market redevelopment scheme.

Between the covers, there is mention of the Society campaigning for the Borough Council to commission a traffic survey, Sainsbury's plans for a super-store, opposition to Chartwell's cattle market plans, campaigning for the West Front refurbishment, the purchase of the Manor House, the creation and protection of open spaces in and around the urban environment.

My final Chairman's report concluded with these words: 'Anything worthwhile which survives the test of time calls for active participation and constant vigilance.'

Susan Tamlyn (1990-91)

I was asked to take the chair for a second time to resolve three matters:

- the constitution: during the year it was established with legal advice that sovereignty lay with the members.
- premises to house the Society's records and from where it can carry on its business. No 86 Whiting Street was quickly acquired and is still rented for this purpose.
- the start of work on the Unitarian Meeting House. Following a meeting with English

Heritage, our proposed donation of £10,000 was doubled to £20,000. We later paid for tables and chairs.

In addition to the major donations to the Meeting House, the Society offered financial support for the repair of St Louis Gatehouse and for the landscaping around St John's Church.

During 1991, the Society continued to be involved in meetings with possible developers of the cattle market site, particularly Chartwell (who were eventually awarded the contract) and Anglia (whom the Society favoured) but continued to press the Council for a revised brief having resolved that 'the scale of the proposed Cattle Market development is premature. No development should be considered on the site until the Town Plan incorporating the cattle market is determined.'

The consultation draft to the Local Plan was published in June 1990. The Society suggested additional policies to cover:

- protection of St Edmunds Hill and the land around Rushbrooke Lane;
- a site for mobile homes and caravans;
- stringent conditions on the Business Park at Rougham;
- the allocation of substantial space for residential development on the Robert Boby Site as well as on the cattle market site;
- traffic management in the town centre.

The Inspector's report on objections to proposals in the Local Plan supports policies one and four above. Numbers two and three are, it seems, no longer required and the present Council is currently getting to grips with number five!

Peter Plumridge 1991-1993

My first year saw the Society's 20th anniversary and just as 1971 had been a call to arms against unseemly development, so it was again in 1991.

We marked the anniversary with a nostalgic but forward-looking celebration in the newly-restored Unitarian Meeting House in Churchgate Street. We were able to savour the

building's beautiful architecture of the early 18th century, reflect upon past activities and counsel watchfulness over large-scale developments looming on the horizon.

All previous chairmen attended the evening and we welcomed the Mayor, a member of long standing, who proposed the toast to the future. The Meeting House was an appropriate venue since we recalled that we had contributed £20,000 towards its restoration and a further £3,500 for seating, these donations being possible by the generosity of the Dr Rae bequest.

The two years 1991-3 were dominated by planning issues, principally building but also the Tayfen Meadows scheme, the Cattle Market proposals and preparation for the Local Plan Enquiry. These activities were very time-consuming and produced much paperwork. The renting of new office space was invaluable.

As Chairman, I attended a meeting of national amenity societies, held in York, when the importance of a strong and informed organisation was stressed - how appropriate! We felt it prudent to become re-affiliated to the Civic Trust and likewise our now Planning Officer represented us at a conference of the English Historic Towns Forum, then solely local authority based but providing a stepping stone to our future involvement.

The years saw the introduction of pedestrian-priority measures in the town, the trial closure of Abbeygate Street (for two days a week) whilst The Traverse was paved over.

Although one can pick out such events from a term of office, the single item which stands out above all others is that thread of continuity which runs through the Society, namely a concern that the quality and character of our town be retained and enhanced. As I said many times that does not mean standing still but rather ensuring that any change is in keeping with the environment and character of the town.



Sir Reginald Harland and Barbara Hill

Sir Reginald Harland (1993-94)

The main event during The Society's year 1993-94 was the Public Enquiry into the Borough's Local Plan. It lasted from October to April. The preparation work in the previous year had taken much time from Canon Eric Graves, the Society's Planning Officer, and Mark Pawling. Mark bore most of the burden for debating many of our objections with the Inspector. Incidentally, the Inspector's Report, recently published, seems very supportive of most of our objections.

The other main controversy was over the siting of the new bus station. Some members, headed by Barbara Rampling, preferred St Andrews Street South; whilst others preferred St Andrews Street North. The latter, supported by the Borough Council, won out. However, problems with funding delayed it for another year - and the 'Knight's Pavilion' was finally opened in April 1996.

During the year a (slightly) revised constitution was published so that all the Society's members could have a copy. It had been amended to match the needs of the Civic Trust and the 1992 Charities Act.

At the end of the year, Eric resigned as Planning Officer, having done it since taking over from Mrs Eileen Backhouse in 1984. Clare Heritage resigned as Secretary during the year and Isobel Ashton, from whom she had taken over in 1991, resumed that post in 1994.

My wife and I had expected to move away from Bury St Edmunds in 1994 so I served only one year as Chairman, handing over to Mrs Barbara Hill. However, the house in Norfolk that we had

selected then 'failed' both the survey and the search; so we are still trying to find an ideal home on less than our present four floors!

Mrs Barbara Hill (1994-)

The first impression of The Bury Society that I received was whilst being on the other side of the fence, so to speak, during the St John's Street saga. I realised then the importance of such an organisation.

There is no doubt that by bringing to the notice of the public those larger issues which have the potential to alter drastically the market town of Bury and attending to smaller planning details, the Society has become a focal point for people who wish to express their feelings and views. This latter part of our work is essential because although decisions on planning matters are limited by law, the Society's brief enables it to consider and progress the interests of those members who cherish and love our town.

Since its inception in 1971, the Society has fulfilled its aims and obligations by keeping members informed, supporting ventures in the town and keeping abreast of changing attitudes.

The rejection of Chartwell's Cattle Market development marked a watershed in the Society's progress. We have established a good working relationship with the Borough Council and are now able to present the ideas of the Society, confident that they will be listened to.

We have now become pro-actionary rather than reactionary. These thoughts must have been in the minds of those brave pioneers in 1971 and shows the way forward for the Bury Society's next quarter of a century.



The bottom of Abbeygate Street

Best Wishes from St Edmundsbury Council

The Bury Society and the Borough Council have been associates - and occasionally opponents - over the many developments that have occurred in the town in the past half century. We were delighted to receive the following message.

Involvement in the local government function by the people of Bury St Edmunds has a chequered history. Bury St Edmunds is a town which was created by the abbey, for the abbey, the pope having decreed that the town was assigned to the service of the church. All its inhabitants were St Edmund's men and under the domination of the abbey. The town was developed within a rigid, planned street pattern and the abbot's enforcement officer demolished buildings erected without permission. The uprising of 1327 extracted some concessions but these were short-lived.

Even when the tomb of St Edmund was defaced in 1539 and the abbot was pensioned off to a house in Sparhawk Street, the town did not receive its independence. The Guildhall Feoffees took on certain duties, such as repairing the town walls and bridges, but it was not until 1606 that the town's first charter was granted.

Local government went through many changes over the next few centuries. The most recent of these was the loss of West Suffolk and the formation of the Borough of St Edmundsbury in 1974.

This period was significant not only for the reorganisation of local government but also for the emergence of participation by members of the public in civic matters. Local plans became the subject of open public meetings; anybody was encouraged to comment upon planning applications which were advertised; files became open for inspection. National and local amenity bodies were created by like-minded people coming together so that an informed point of view could be heard.

It was the proposal to re-develop the top of St John's Street which caused the people of Bury St Edmunds to form their own amenity group in this way. The scheme would have been a

development typical of the 1960s, designed by a nationally-renowned architect, with flat roofs and innovative materials. It would have entirely swept away a complete segment of the town centre. Few towns managed to escape redevelopment of this type and the Bury Society prides itself on being instrumental in the decision not to go ahead with the project.

While the Borough Council and the Bury Society may not always agree, there is no doubt that the consensus of opinion generated by the Society is always highly respected. Its members work hard to be involved in day-to-day planning matters as well as the big issues. All applications for planning, listed building and conservation area consent are vetted once a week and the Society is represented on the influential Conservation Area Advisory Committee. The Bury Society was actively involved in making representation on the local plan and, through negotiation, was able to achieve valuable modifications to policies and proposals. Its professional approach to the local plan enquiry was welcomed.

Any local amenity group will jealously guard its independence and its right to openly declare an opinion contrary to that being put forward by the local authority but both the Bury St Edmunds Society and St Edmundsbury Borough Council recognise that they have common goals. We wish to increase the town's prosperity but to retain its character; we want to keep it a unique place in which to live, work, shop and play; we seek to conserve its historic buildings and protect its early street-pattern but at the same time we recognise that the town must be a strong player in the 21st century.

The Bury Society is affiliated to the English Historic Towns Forum and the Borough Council is an active member of that influential and well-regarded body. We are both working together to organise the annual conference of the English Towns Forum in the town in 1996. We are both enthusiastic about the Historic Core Zone concept which was initiated by the Forum and is now being taken forward in a practical way by the Borough Council. This work provides the basis for a strong relationship between the Bury Society and the Borough Council during the next twenty five years.



The Abbey Ruins