



MINUTES OF RVPS ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING **Held on Thursday 3rd March 2016** **at Bromley Court Hotel**

Members present: Brian Atkinson, Dawn Colby, Susan Coleborn, Val Crowdy, John Ealey, Dolores Ealey, David England, Tony Ferrison, Kathleen Hutton, Iris Holley, Maureen Johnson, Wally Johnson, Anna Koffer, Clive Lees, Elizabeth McFall, Gillian McIntosh, Euan McMaster, Sharon Miles, Linda Müller, Beatrice Osborn, David Page, Mick Pinson, Marilyn Pinson, Kate Romanos, Cllr Michael Rutherford, Pat Semken, David Skinner, Karen Summers, Pat Tucker, Leslie Tucker, Leslie Watmore, Wendy Watmore

Apologies: Richard Thomas, Monica & Dave Wiltshire

- 1 **Chairman's welcome and opening remarks:** Clive Lees welcomed people to the meeting, in particular new members, and introduced the Speaker, Mr Max Ball on the topic of Bromley Court Hotel. He expressed the Society's thanks to Max and the family who own the Hotel for their hospitality over the years – a great contribution to the community.
- 2 **Guest Speaker:** Mr Max Ball, Manager Bromley Court Hotel
Max started by saying that there are many stories connected to the Hotel and some of them vary in the details. Here are the key points from the Hotel's history.
First in 1776 there was a small villa on this site. Villas in the area were popular with opulent merchants seeking pure air. Piggott's Guide in 1823 described Lewisham as a pleasant village, commended Bexley for its salubrious air and described the Cray valley as the most beautiful.
A man called Charles Long, later Baron Farnborough, bought the building; he was the 4th son of West Indies merchant and became a Government minister. He went on a Grand Tour and was inspired by Rome, developing a love of art and architecture. In around 1800, he pulled down the first villa and rebuilt it, though there is one pillar from the original building surviving. Among his friends were William Pitt at Keston and William Wilberforce at Clapham who visited along with the Duke of Wellington and Charles Darwin. The Regency Kings George IV and William IV also visited. Charles married in 1793 and his wife, Amelia, designed the Italianate Gardens which terraces still exist today. The house had grounds of 138 acres. There were three lodges, including at one end the Garden Gate which gave its name to a pub (McDonalds is now on that site). The grounds were open to visitors on Thursdays. Charles acquired a considerable art collection; some of the paintings are now in the National Gallery and the Royal Academy.
Amelia died in 1837 and Charles in 1838. They had no children so a nephew Samuel Long inherited the estate. He in turn died in 1881 and the house and grounds were sold to Samuel Cawston. In 1904 the house was converted to a hotel. Parcels of estate land were sold off, partly because of the demand for housing with the coming of the railway and to raise money.
During the First World War the hotel was let to the Canadian military as a convalescent home. In 1931 the property was bought by Leon Frenkel from Switzerland who made his money from importing olive oil. His daughter and wife ran the hotel. The same family own the hotel today.
During the Second World War the hotel was used as accommodation for RAF pilots stationed at Biggin Hill. Harold MacMillan held a cabinet meeting here during the Suez Crisis.
In the 1960s the hotel was a popular live music venue. Bands that performed at the Bromel Club included The Who, Davy Jones and the Manish Boys, David Bowie and Jimi Hendrix. In the 1970s, the hotel became a successful venue for weddings and christenings.
A couple of stories linked to the hotel are that there is a tunnel which comes out by the Italian Villa on Elstree Hill (however the soil is not suited for tunnelling and no trace at the hotel end has been found) and that there is the ghost of a dairy maid Elizabeth Mann who was murdered in June 1796 on Bromley Hill – the gardener was arrested by the Bow Street Runners and executed.
The Hotel has recently regained independence from the Best Western chain and has plans for adding a Sky Bar on top of the new wing, building a swimming pool and leisure centre, and reopening the original main entrance.

Clive introduced the Officers present.

- 3 **Minutes of last meeting:** Approval of the minutes of the 2015 AGM was unanimously agreed by the meeting with one correction, that Gillian McIntosh be added to the list of attendees.
- 4 **Chairman's report including changes to the Constitution:** This year had been a record year with 10 planning appeals, a number of which we won and a number still ongoing. We donated £6000 for two tree projects and £500 towards the Christmas lights in Shortlands which have been well received. The Society has done a good job in fostering community spirit, for example by supporting individuals to make their own objections to planning applications and through the Tree Friends group. The bimonthly meetings have been well attended. Clive briefly outlined the proposed revision to the Constitution:
 "2. Membership of the Society
 a) Anyone resident **over 18** in the Area is eligible to be a Member"
This was agreed unanimously.
Clive also took the opportunity to thank our local Councillors Will Harmer, Nicola Dykes, Michael Tickner and Michael Rutherford.
- 5 **Treasurer's Report:** Dave Wiltshire's written report noted the commitment to fund the tree projects and the expenditure on the Christmas decorations. The Society has had reserves and these are worthy causes. The accounts were audited and approved in Jan 2016. For the year ending 31st Dec 2015 income was £2448 and expenditure £1722, giving a surplus for the year of £726, and a total balance of £12,611. Received.
- 6 **Planning Officer's Report:** In Richard Thomas' absence the Chair said there had been around 10 appeals. Notable rejected appeals were Billingford and Oakdene, Oaklands Road.
- 7 **Roads & Traffic:** Andrew Storey noted the new flashing sign warning motorists on the approach to Valley School. He also commented on the Transport for London consultation on a possible extension to the Bakerloo line.
- 8 **Community Projects and Tree Officer's Report:** Monica Wiltshire reported that the main focus this year has been the two Tree Projects jointly with Bromley Council. 25 trees were planted in Farnaby Road, Downs Hill and Warren Ave. There are plans for a further 30 trees in Ravensbourne Avenue, Warren Avenue and Farnaby Road. We continue to welcome suggestions for other projects. Wendy Watmore had emailed to encourage people to get involved in Street Friends: the Council provide litter pickers and bags and a few people with half an hour's work can make a lot of difference.
- 9 **Beckenham Place Park Representative's Report:** Leslie Tucker said that since he wrote the report Lewisham have announced consultation dates at lots of different venues through March. Information will also be published on the website. After 22 years, finally plans are in progress for improvements to the Park.
- 10 **Membership Secretary's Report:** 486 households out of about 1200 that our area covers are on the membership register compared to 493 last year. 305 households have chosen to receive the newsletters and other Society information by email; this is 63% (up from 52% last year). While we would like to increase the numbers receiving information by email, anyone who wants a paper copy will still get it. Changes to Road Reps include Barbara Price who is standing down owing to ill health after many years of hard work and Sarah Jane Durman who is moving out of the area. Sandra West and Anna Koffer are the new volunteers. Many thanks as always to the Road Reps.
- 11 **Determination of subscriptions for 2015-16:** Dave Wiltshire in his report proposed maintaining the current subscription at £5. Approved. Senior Citizens and those in special financial circumstances are able to contribute as appropriate.
- 12 **Appointment of auditor:** Pura Atkinson, being willing to continue, was reappointed unanimously.
- 13 **Election of Officers:** No one had asked to stand for any of the posts and those in post are all willing to continue. The Chair, Clive Lees, the Secretary, Beatrice Osborn, the Treasurer, Dave Wiltshire and Vice Chair and Membership Secretary Linda Müller were re-elected unanimously.
- 14 **Chairman's Closing Remarks:** Clive Lees thanked the officers for their work – he is grateful that we just get on with our roles. Thanks also to the Webmaster David England and the Newsletter Editor Euan McMaster, to all the Road Reps, and to our Councillors for their support. Beatrice proposed a Vote of thanks to the Chair on behalf of the meeting.
- 15 **The next bi-monthly meeting** will be on Thursday 5th May 2016 – members are welcome to attend.