

**EAST FARNHAM – OVERVIEW – an area of innovation?****The Aldershot Army Camp and Pubs**

In 1854 the Army Camp set up in Aldershot and many of the cottagers close by, on the common in Upper Hale, took in soldiers' washing. Bishop Sumner is thought to have given plots of land around Farnham Park in Upper Hale to itinerant camp followers. Many pubs opened up in Hale and in East Street Farnham, with the result that drunkenness and public disorder was rife. Many of these pubs subsequently had their licenses removed in the early years of the twentieth century. [See R 6]

**The Natives of Hale Ward are accepted**

In 1866 the villages of Hale, Heath End, Weybourne and Badshot Lea were excluded from the Urban District of Farnham and were part of the Rural District. By 1908 Farnham UDC had been petitioned by elders from the Hale Ward to be joined to the Farnham sewerage system - the sewage farm had already been sited at Monkton Lane near Hale. In 1913 the Hale Ward (comprising the 4 villages) were annexed to Farnham UDC and the sewerage followed afterward. [See R6]

**From Coaches and Carts to Cars**

George Sturt, author of "The Wheelwright's Shop" lived and worked in Farnham. His family business in East Street – coach, cart and van makers since the early nineteenth century, by the late 1890s had given way to building the bodywork of motor vehicles – especially *char-a-bancs*. Several motor vehicle makers or suppliers opened in the twentieth century in East Street. As Farnham's wealth from the hop trade declined and the subsequent over-indulgence in alcohol, it was replaced to some extent by the enthusiasm for motoring. By the mid-twentieth century Farnham boasted its very own world champion motor-racing driver, Mike Hawthorn – at the Tourist Trophy garage in East Street. This garage had developed from original workshops which had come about through Swain and Jones in East Street teaming up with Sturt and Goatcher in 1914.

**The Inventor and the Internal Combustion Engine**

Sir John Henry Knight, thought to be the first person to build a petrol-driven car in Britain, had been born in Weybourne House and then lived at Barfield, Runfold – also on the east side of Farnham. He was a wealthy inventor and before building his famous car, had already produced a steam-powered, hop-digging machine in 1872 and a petrol-driven tricycle in 1896. He was also an esteemed photographer.

**Electricity and Cinemas**

In 1912, electricity came late to Farnham, two years after Hindhead had established their own supplies and 10 years since the Council first considered the matter. Once the decision was actually taken, cables were soon laid, first from the Town Hall, down the Borough and along East Street. At once a new enthusiasm took hold: some 3 cinemas were opened in the East Street area over the next decades, although the last and largest, the Regal (later the Odeon) closed and was demolished in the 1980s. [See R 7]

**Leisure and Culture**

The Farnham UDC bought the Brightwell Estate, off East Street in 1920 and opened up the grounds for public leisure and recreation. A swimming pool, bowling green and tennis courts were opened and the Pleasure Gardens hosted band concerts and dances throughout the 1930s. In the 1970s permission was given for Brightwell House to be converted to a theatre and an innovative auditorium design was incorporated into the new Redgrave Theatre at Brightwells. The auditorium was a

prototype for the Barbican in London. The theatre had a royal patron, Princess Margaret and was acknowledged to be one of the most successful repertory theatres in the country in the 1980s. Many of today's well-known actors began their careers at the Redgrave and also its predecessor, the tiny Castle Theatre off Castle Street. [See R1 and R11]

Brightwells Bowling Club and the Tennis Club both flourished from the 1930s into the 21st Century. However, the open air swimming pool did not, and was demolished in the 1980s. The Council built flats for residential care for the elderly on the site. A modern Sports Centre with indoor pool was built on an adjacent site in Dogflud Way.

### **The Woolmead**

In the 1960s East Street had been highlighted by the Council as an area suitable for a new shopping area. The north side between Bear Lane and The Seven Stars pub was identified for this development and 40 old properties were demolished to make way for a modern block of shops, offices and flats. The architecture of this new 'Woolmead' development is typical of its time and much despised by the townspeople. However, the owners, have enjoyed a substantial income from a variety of shops of all types and sizes, ranging from large chains stores such as Sainsburys, Iceland and Peacocks to Oxfam and individual specialists and are in no hurry to replace the buildings. These owners of the Woolmead also speculatively acquired the site of the old Regal Cinema opposite in East Street in the 1980s and have refused to sell the site to the Council for a new development. [See R5, R7 and R10]

### **East Street Regeneration**

Following the closure of the Redgrave Theatre in 1998 and indications that the Farnham Health Centre was looking to move its location from Brightwells, Waverley Borough Council worked on a Planning Brief to developers interested in the regeneration of "East Street". The townspeople felt that East Street Woolmead buildings needed replacing and the site of the demolished cinema had become an eyesore. But, the ideas put forward in the Council's brief in 2001, focussed intensively on its own land at Brightwells and the proposals that were finally accepted in 2003 did not contain the Woolmead.

A series of planning applications submitted for the East Street Regeneration contained several large blocks of flats, an 8 screen cinema and many shops, no theatre, no tennis courts, and eventually, no bowling green. Almost 6,000 objections were received to the final application on the grounds that the development was too large and unsuitable for a historic market town. The loss of the community leisure facilities was also a cause for much protest. The Tennis Club are due to be removed to Riverside –a polluted site once occupied by the old Gas Holders. The members of the Bowling Club were threatened with eviction and they left, frightened and upset in 2006. Their clubhouse was demolished in 2009. The Council finally approved the plans in 2008, but due to financial difficulties the developer has not been able to start work and after 10 years, the future of the development is uncertain. [See also R8, R11]

### **Present and Future Plans**

Waverley Borough Council has identified Badshot Lea as an area which could take over 1,000 new homes. Close by, at Runfold, near Barfield School and Moor Park, a sand pit site has been identified by SITA, (an international organisation for waste disposal) as a possible place for the largest industrial scale 'recycling centre' in the UK – and possibly in Europe. The Sainsbury Superstore at Water Lane has indicated that it may extend its store even further. A huge private Sports facility is being created at Water Lane to provide rugby pitches, tennis courts, bowlinggreen, indoor courts, gyms and pools.

The old sewage farm is still struggling to cope. The smells are appalling and have been so ever since they were built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

