

Number  
**THIRTEEN**  
Summer  
1986

# The Harborne Society

# NEWS

## GREEN-UP IN HARBORNE

by Phil Simpson

Over the last few years a quiet revolution has been taking place on our main roads. The central reservations and dead little patches of grass have been transformed into masses of shrubs, roses and trees. This new landscaping has been specifically designed to give interest in texture, colour and form all year round with eventually minimum maintenance. It has also given us a new phrase "Greening our City". This is Operation Greenup, the original idea of County Councillor Len Clark who set aside 1% of the roads budget to make our roads and city a better environment.

### Greenup in Harborne?

So where is Operation Greenup in Harborne, you may ask? Nowhere and there are no plans by the City Council to extend it to Harborne. And that's where the Harborne Society come in. If the City won't do it for us we'll do it ourselves. Although we don't have the large expanses of dual carriageway or acres of turf around our multistorey flats there are many small dead areas which with a little effort could positively contribute to our environment. Our objective in the coming months is to identify these areas, trace their ownership and agree a scheme for "greening" these spaces with the owners.

### Where?

Although as I've said there is no shortage of dead areas in Harborne it requires a hard look to identify these, we're so used to the "look of the place". The view of York Street car park shows an immediate need — even a few bushes along the front would effect a great improvement. The same can be said for St. John's



Street car parks. And what about that wall built at great expense by Bryant's — a few hanging baskets or window boxes perhaps? The traffic island (or desert island) at Station Road/Gordon Road is another site. Nearby there is a green area next to the Fire Station but are nettles, docks and ryegrass making the best use of a valuable small area.

### How?

Having identified the sites, we would need to design the planting schemes. This could be done by imitating the existing Greenup ideas from other areas or by designing our own. Within Harborne I'm sure we have the landscaping and horticultural skills to do it. You've been waiting to be asked, haven't you?

The planting could be done by volunteers working weekends and evenings or as the City's Operation Greenup does it. This is a Manpower Services Commission scheme where unemployed people are paid a basic wage funded by the MSC and the "client" pays for the materials used — in the case of plants, not expensive. The Harborne Society could either set up our own scheme or possible negotiate with the existing scheme run by the City.

### The Cost

Before the enthusiasts demand to know why all the work hasn't been done yet and the pessimists throw their hands up in horror at the expense, we need to emphasise two things. Any scheme like this must be modest both in cost and volunteer time required. It must also be considered, and implemented over a sensible time period; it's not a mad few months' work and then finished. If it is carried through in a modest timely fashion the Harborne Society itself could manage most of the expense, supplemented by donations as necessary from time to time.

### What Next?

Briefly you. That's the idea now we need your help. People to organise; people to discuss with owners; people to design the planting; people to do the planting; people to look after the plants and people to keep the money side right. Even if you don't want to join the Harborne Society, contact me or come along to our first meeting in September so that we can get the idea moving — and, please, we don't want super specialists. We want people who care, who want to improve their community, who care about Harborne. We want you.

# CHAIRMAN'S LETTER

This is the sixth time that the Harborne Society has produced a newsletter which is intended to reach the majority of the people living in Harborne.

The Society itself has been in existence since 1964 and, during this time, it has come to mean much to many people. But there must still be a great number of you who either have never heard of us or do not know what our aims are.

It is hard to sum up these aims in a few words. Perhaps the best way would be to say that we try to foster a sense of community and a pride in our environment. In Harborne we had a head start in the fact that, to many people, we are still 'the village', separated from the centre of Birmingham by tree-lined Edgbaston, playing fields and parks — a virtual green belt.

The Harborne Society has always put every possible effort into encouraging the best kind of conservation and development in the area. Over the years we have established an excellent working relationship with planners and developers alike. We have endeavoured to represent the interests of Harborne wherever possible and to put forward positive proposals for the future.

We have also tried to encourage a spirit of community by our social events and by our monthly meetings, a chance not only to hear interesting speakers but to meet other people, to hear what is happening in Harborne and to express your own views.

We have, at the moment, a membership of some 500, but there must be many more of you who would like to make a contribution to both the present and the future of Harborne, either by coming along to the meetings, details of which are given in this Newsletter, or working in some specific way for your community.

Why not fill in the application form now?

Yours Sincerely  
MARY ABBOTT

## EDITORIAL TEAM

Phil Simpson 427 2945  
Liz Moss 426 1814  
Paul Whitehouse, Peter Miles and Margery Elliott. Any comments, enquiries or copy, please phone Liz or Phil.

## The Singing Postman by Madeline Aston

DID YOU KNOW that Edward Capern — the singing postman — lived in Harborne from 1866 — 1884, when he returned to his native Bideford. Introducing himself to the readers of his first volume of poems he wrote:

No classic tutor watched my life  
Nor speech, with beauty  
fraught  
Refined my uncouth mother  
tongue  
Or woo'd my virgin thought.

I never cursed in college cell,  
(The thought I could not  
brook)  
Nor poured amid the antique  
page  
For lore from musty book

I never in the schools was made  
A fool against my will.  
Nor danced with Dames in rich  
brocade  
My studious hours to fill.

But I have loved as all should  
love  
The whole of human kind  
And there are men of worth who  
know  
How much I honour mind.

In 1881 he produced his last volume "Sungleams and Shadows", dedicated to Alderman Thomas Avery JP of Edgbaston, published by Cornish Bros. Has anyone got a copy or know where one can be seen?

## BUS GARAGE UPDATE

Following the article about the bus garage in News No. 12, discussions have taken place, but largely to no avail. It is evident that the sports provision budget has been cut and Harborne is unlikely to see any improvements in the near future. We are now looking for enterprising private companies to run the Harborne Leisure Centre! But all is not gloom; children at Station Road School have their own ideas for the garage. Clara Penn would have a stage, a playgroup, a sports room, an elderly people's club as well as a job centre and advice centre in her Community Centre. As she says: "People should realise the value of a good community centre and that is why I think Harborne should have one in the garage. Marianne Hill wanted art and craft rooms, studios for dance and jazz, photography and computer rooms as well as an interest and information room, all arranged around a place to sit. Everything in her centre would create jobs for the unemployed.

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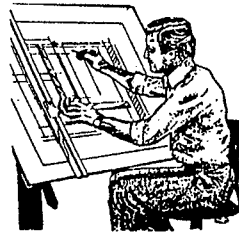
Also within F. W. Cook Dept.  
Store, Top High Street,  
Dudley.

## THE HARBORNE MUSEUM

Another idea for the bus garage was from Catherine Hall, who thought it would be a good idea to have a museum in Harborne because school children could go for visits to it. Also old people who could not get into town would be able to visit a museum in Harborne.

She thought a donation could be paid for entrance but nobody would have to pay. Some of the museum profits could go to help repair some of the more tatty houses in Harborne! In conclusion she felt it would be educational and something to do for those people who have nothing to do.

# TECHNICAL REPORT



Technical Officer's Report  
by Michael Perraudin

All over Harborne at the moment, in some of the most prominent sites, new buildings are going up — offices, shops and dwellings. When completed, they will, it is fair to say, change the face of the area, for good or ill, and it is interesting to reflect on this process as it occurs. The previous phase of new buildings, in the 1960's and 70's, had its own great impact, with shops, office blocks, maisonettes, houses, in various versions of a flat-roofed, large-windowed, generally longitudinal modernist style — notably with the shopping precinct in the lower High Street, St. John's Church, the massive Health Service office block near Prince's Corner, etc.

Now a marked change in taste has taken place, first with a general return to traditional materials (brick, wood), and now with more comprehensive efforts at emulating styles of the past, particularly local vernacular styles. In Harborne this means above all new buildings of late-Victorian domestic character.

This is a development we generally sympathise with (except where wholly viable genuine 19th century buildings are bulldozed and replaced by imitation ones!). But it has its problems. In particular, whereas modernist buildings lacked precise standards for us to judge them by, buildings imitating past styles will be judged by the standards of the styles they imitate — and are quite likely to be found wanting.

## New beginnings

The first major example (after some small house terraces in side streets) was the High Street block containing McDonald's, in red brick with a pitched slate roof and sash-type windows, set on a prominent corner site with a corner gable. The building has not displeasing proportions, with upper windows of a suitable size, gables adequately suited to the windows (though they could have been larger), etc. It is also nicely set back from the street, has a roof of attractive natural slates, and other features. But its windows should have been wood, the windowless ground floor in York Street is awful,



the brick chosen (a deep red, unvarying in tone) is unsympathetic, rather aggressive, and the facade is short of upper-storey ornamentation to offset crude, garish shop-fronts. O.K., not a bad beginning.....

## Well chosen bricks

The office terrace nearing completion opposite the Green Man is an interesting contrast. It is designed certainly more thoughtfully, even quirkily. It shows particularly the virtue of well-chosen brick — a very interesting, variegated tone, harmonising well with its surroundings. It also offers a corner gable, plus an effective stepped front (set back from the road), a roof of (rather heavy) tiles, sash-shaped wooden windows, vaguely early-Victorian doors, and a great deal of decoration to the facade (decorative brickwork below the gutters, distinctive window-ledges, etc.). Is there too much decoration? I am not sure. But one or two things definitely don't work. The stepped front emphasises (even more than with the McDonald's block) the lack of chimneys. The roof should overhang more. And the windows are a great pity: sash-shaped, but hinging at the top, a little too small, and not properly recessed, as on Victorian houses, so giving a disappointing flatness to the facade. If for a few penn'orth these details could have been attended to (genuine wooden sashes aren't so expensive; are chimneys really such a problem?), this would be a very satisfactory development.

## The Future

Now at least three more buildings, all in this general style, are extending the sequence: the sheltered housing in Greenfield Road near Vivian Road, the extension to Vine Terrace off the High Street and the shops at 157-167 High Street. It is hard to be sure how they will look, though Vine Terrace perhaps promises best. 157-167 High Street has a peculiar polychromatic brick effect (bluish and red bricks mixed) which may or may not work; but the building is disagreeably high and should be set back further. As to other details of it — varied window-types and roof materials — it will be interesting how they work out. Greenfield Road has the virtue of being low-level; its vices are a very ill-chosen plain, deep-red brick, selected with indifference to the surroundings, and windows promising the same way. Vine Terrace itself is more of a direct Victorian imitation than the others — extending the original Vine Terrace — but seems to be doing this quite accurately (if congestedly).

These are interesting buildings, preferable, we think, to the style they supersede (though inferior to the buildings which often were demolished to make way for them), indicative of a general trend in architecture, but showing in their details little defects and lapses in taste which could easily have been avoided. But successful or not, they are certain to be important features of our local environment for many years to come, and we must and will get used to them.

# The Harborne Society

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1986  
 Sept. 10th, Wednesday St. Peter's  
 "Heart of Gold" An Olympics Presentation.  
 Mr. R. Callicott.  
 Oct. 14th, Tuesday Onneley House  
 The Elan Valley. Mrs. R. Morton.  
 Nov. 12th, Wednesday St. Peter's  
 The Making of a Newspaper, Mr. A. Peet  
 Dec. 9th, Tuesday Onneley House  
 Place Names in the Birmingham Area.  
 Dr. M. Gelling.

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 Feb. 3rd, Tuesday Onneley House  
 Documentary as Drama. Mr. N. Gibbins  
 Late February College of Food  
 Annual Dinner.  
 March 11th, Wednesday St. Peter's  
 The Victorian Society in Birmingham.  
 Mr. J. Holyoak.  
 April 7th, Tuesday Onneley House  
 Tracing your Family Tree. Dr. R. G.  
 Cockerham.  
 May 13th, Wednesday St. Peter's  
 Annual General Meeting. Speaker to be  
 arranged.

NOTE: All meetings commence at 7.30pm unless otherwise stated.

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For your subscription you will receive all issues of the Newsletter, and information about the programme of meetings, the Annual Dinner and Summer Outing and any other social events. **You will also be helping to keep HARBORNE the kind of place we want it to be.**

Simply complete the application form below, and send it to the Treasurer with a crossed cheque or postal order made out to THE HARBORNE SOCIETY.

(A note to existing members:- If you have not yet paid your subscription for 1986-87 you may use either this form or the one already sent to you. This would save the Treasurer having to write you a reminder letter! Many thanks.)

To: William Curr, Treasurer, 23 Vicarage Road, Harborne, Birmingham B17 0SN.

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