

The Birth of the RUELHS in 1964

by Susan Toms

This year, 2014, marks the 50th anniversary of the formation of the Ruislip, Northwood & Eastcote Local History Society. This followed discussions between Ron Edwards and Cliff Morrell who were concerned about new developments replacing older buildings in the area. They felt that these older buildings needed to be protected and recorded before they disappeared. Of particular concern was the proposed demolition of Eastcote House. They decided to approach several local organisations to gauge the response, and a letter was sent to the *Advertiser and Gazette*. As a result of this letter Sir Christopher Cowan offered his support. The letter to the Ruislip Natural History Society produced the reply that they already had a local history section, but after amicable discussions they were in favour of the formation of a separate organisation.

On the 6 April 1964 an initial meeting was held at 24 Cheney Street, Eastcote, to take the idea forward. It was attended by Sir Christopher Cowan, Miss Pollard, Cliff Morrell, W.A.G. Kemp, Mr and Mrs Crane and Ron and Doreen Edwards. This is a report of that meeting from the Society's minute books:

Mr Edwards opened the discussion by giving a variety of reasons why the establishment of a local history society in the district should be considered. These included the rapid growth of new building in the district which was causing the destruction of many features of historic interest which were quite irreplaceable. The next five or ten years could see the elimination of a great many more and the need to ensure that adequate records were preserved was urgent. The example of the forthcoming demolition of Eastcote House was a case in point. Evidence existed of earlier habitations on the site and a great opportunity of investigation would arise at the time.

Discussion showed that opinion amongst those present was unanimous on the need for a local history society. Consideration was given to the fact that the Ruislip Natural History Society also had a local history section but it was felt that as this Society mainly concentrated on aspects of natural history there would not be any clash of interests with a society devoted solely to local history.

The formation of the society was then reviewed. The form favoured by those present as to the most practical proposition was to arrange working parties devoted to particular spheres of local history activity i.e. recording of existing areas of historical interest, investigations into the historical background of the area, research into local dialect etc.

It was proposed and agreed that such a society be formed under the title of The Ruislip, Northwood and Eastcote Local History Society. The initial subscription would be 7s 6d per annum with a reduced subscription of 5s per annum for members under the age of 18.

A caretaker committee was formed from those present and the following members consented to hold office for the time being:

*Chairman Sir Christopher Cowan
Secretary R.G. Edwards
Treasurer C.J. Morrell*

An inaugural public meeting would be held at the Manor Farm Library on May 22nd 1964 at 8pm with the intention of beginning a full programme next autumn. Publicity regarding the meeting to be displayed in the four local branch libraries, in the local press and sent to local secondary schools, resident associations, women's institutes and similar organisations.

Before the first public meeting, another committee meeting was held to finalise arrangements and discuss the further development of the Society. There was an ambitious aim to establish working parties in the following areas: 'photography, cataloguing of existing records, publications and sources of information, surveying and listing memorials and gravestones, origins of street names, collection of reminiscences of older inhabitants, growth of transport, local carriers, growth of local government, archaeology [and] Eastcote House. It was also agreed that maps should be prepared to show the growth of buildings in the area and also listing known areas of historic interest.'

As a foretaste of one of the main functions of the Society, the committee decided to send a letter to the council seeking reassurances on the future of Eastcote Cottage (situated at the junction of Field End Road and Eastcote High Road) which was up for auction.

Our minute book records the first public meeting held at Manor Farm Library on Friday the 22 May 1964 with Councillor C.A. Smith in the chair:

The President opened the meeting by welcoming those present (between 50 and 60) and expressing his own personal appreciation of being able to preside at the opening public meeting of a society which was seeking to explore more fully the background of the area in which we live. The Secretary then gave a brief explanation of why the Society had been formed and of the events that led up to that night's meeting.

Mr L.E. Morris gave a talk of the general cases of local history and pointed out the many deficiencies in knowledge of the immediate locality.

A lively discussion followed supporting the idea of starting a local history society. Good wishes were expressed on behalf of the Ruislip Literary Society, and the representative of the Ruislip Residents Association promised any support his society could give. Northwood College offered to supply a volunteer working party from amongst the scholars. Mr Jarvis, the President of the Uxbridge Local History Society, brought good wishes from his Society and emphasised the continuity of local history.

It was announced that the following preliminary programme had been arranged:

Monday June 22nd at Manor Farm Library at 8.15pm: Miss B.E. Provan of the Middlesex County Record Office will speak about the County Record Office with

reference to the material concerning Ruislip and district.

Saturday July 4th at Manor Farm Library at 2.30pm: a conducted tour of Ruislip Parish Church and the Manor Farm by Mr L.E. Morris.

Monday September 21st, venue to be announced, 8.15pm: Ruislip-Northwood - the growth of the suburb 1887-1939 [by] Mr D.W. Massey.

It was agreed at a committee meeting in June that 'a satisfactory start had been made' with 'an enthusiastic attendance of approximately 60 people'. This meeting was attended by Mr Marks who had been appointed by LAMAS to investigate the condition of Eastcote House in view of its proposed demolition. The minutes state he gave a full report to the committee and his report would be lodged with the Secretary but unfortunately I can find no trace of this report. The next committee meeting in October confirmed that the demolition was going ahead but it was noted that 'the building had been allowed to deteriorate to the extent of requiring demolition'.

One of the motivations behind the formation of the Society was a concern over the proposed demolition of one of Eastcote's 'great houses'. The Society was not able to save Eastcote House but over the last fifty years many local buildings have been preserved and there is a greater awareness of the importance of conserving our local heritage. Hopefully the Society and its members have played a part in changing these attitudes.

Sources:

Memories of the Society from 1964-1977, by D. Edwards *RNELHS Journal* 1978

RNELHS Minute book number 1, April 1964 - September 1970

Report on first public meeting, *Advertiser and Gazette*, 29 May 1964.

YOU CAN CONTRIBUTE TO THIS JOURNAL

The Society has a research group which is open to all members. Research ranges from delving into dusty archives to reading old newspapers, looking at censuses or interviewing long term residents. The First World War period is obviously popular at the moment, but more or less any topic is valid. Members have collected old postcards or written the history of their road. Our old Journals are gradually being put online, so you will be able to see what has been done previously.

We also have two exhibitions each year at Manor Farm, for which we need material, and would be grateful for help with presentation. Eileen Bowlt and other researchers provide support and guidance, and you can assist with a group project or carry out your own research.

If you would like to have a go, or just see what is involved, please contact Melanie Winterbotham: Email:-melaniew@btinternet.com Tel: 01895 634225