

1964

by Philip Toms

The Society's December 2014 meeting was, in part, a celebration of our 50th anniversary. The following light-hearted talk drew on stories from the local newspaper and information gathered from a variety of sources.

Hello, welcome to Ruislip, Northwood and Eastcote. I'm speaking to you at the end of 1964 and would like to give you an impression of our area and some of the events that have occurred this year.

TRANSPORT

Some may view our area as just a pleasant residential dormitory for the Metropolis, and it is true that we have excellent connections to the City using the Metropolitan line, and although fares have risen this year they remain very reasonable - a day return to Aldgate or Liverpool Street only costs 7s 10d with the monthly season costing £6 15s. We are also well served by the Piccadilly and Central lines by which we may travel to other parts of London.

Now, I know there have been a few gripes about these services and particularly about the buses of which we have perhaps too few routes - only seven by today's counting. But I did read right at the tail end of the year that our MP is going to do his best to get better rail and bus services for us.

But just over our border there is an exciting proposal to create a fast route between Heathrow and Paddington. The idea is to drain the Grand Junction Canal, lay concrete tracks on its bed, and run hover-coaches running at 80mph along it. They say the journey will take 20 minutes instead of the hour it takes coaches today. Although this won't go through Ruislip it won't be too far away from us and it might be convenient for us to use it from time to time.

SHOPS

In any event, we have good shopping centres and you can almost certainly buy everything you need locally.

Take Ruislip High Street for example. I walked along it the other day.

For food shopping there are 6 bakers, 5 butchers, 2 fishmongers and no fewer than 12 grocers and fruiterers.

If you need a new outfit there are 15 clothes shops, 3 tailors and 5 shoe shops to choose from.

And if you want anything household there are decorating and furniture shops, an ironmongers and, of course, good old Woolworths. And if you want to get the new BBC2 channel that was launched this year there are several radio and television shops to go to.

Your bank almost certainly has a branch here, and you can also pop into the Post Office, the Gas and Electricity Boards.

When you need to take a break why not pop into a café. There are 4 in the High Street to choose from.

HOUSING

Now unfortunately house prices in our area have been rising recently, perhaps a bit more than the national trend.

Semi-detached houses in Ruislip and Eastcote are now averaging out at about £4,750 but it is more difficult to put a figure on prices in Northwood.

You see, in Northwood some owners are moving to smaller houses. They then sell off their old house and land to developers who then re-develop the plot. Sometimes several properties in one road may be sold off allowing the whole area to be re-developed as an estate. And so builders are bidding against each other for these sites and the prices are going up as a result.

LEISURE

But our area is still a great place to live in. The Council has worked hard to ensure a country feel and more than one fifth of our district is taken up by woods and parks, playing fields, golf courses and riverside walks.

One magnet is Ruislip Lido. Do you remember the hot August bank holiday week this year when more than 30000 people flocked there? The grass area was just like Blackpool! I don't know who did the counting but apparently over 6000 deckchairs were hired that week and more than 2000 people went rowing, while over 3000 children took to the paddle boats.

Such numbers inevitably meant a lot of cars in the area -- some 2500 were parked inside the grounds with a further 1100 outside, -- and I can't but think that if the Lido continues to be popular

parking could become a bit of a contentious issue in the future. On that front perhaps it's good news that the Council have resolutely set their face against the introduction of parking meters and multi-story car parks anywhere within the UDC.

But we cannot always rely on hot sunny weather and the keen swimmer must now be on cloud nine with the opening of the new Highgrove Swimming Pool this July by the Chairman of Middlesex County Council. He said that he had always fancied launching a ship so perhaps that's why he declared "Bless this bath and all who use it" when he opened the pool. The Council is rightly proud of this £350,000 facility and so too, it seems, are the residents for they have attended it in huge numbers since it opened with nearly 2500 going just on Bank Holiday Monday itself.

Sport was prominent this year with the Olympic Games being held in Tokyo. Ruislip-Northwood had more athletes representing the country than any other local authority and the athletes plus the team physiotherapist were duly presented with mementos at a civic ceremony.

For the less energetic it seems to have been a vintage year for filmgoers at our three cinemas. Between them the Astoria, Rivoli and Rex have shown films such as *The Pink Panther*, *Zulu*, *Charade*, *Tom Jones*, and this year's Bond film which of course is *Goldfinger*.

ANNIVERSARY

On a sombre note, this year marks the 50th anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War and the local paper carried several letters of reminiscences of that conflict. I noticed one particularly, for it was written by Mr J.F. Cole who lives in Cornwall Road, Ruislip. He was in the Kings Royal Rifle Corps and in October 1916 was at the Somme.

He described a strange coincidence as they were moving forward. On the road they met a party of German prisoners being escorted to the rear when one suddenly recognised and reached out to the soldier next to him. It turned out that the German formerly ran a hairdressing business in north London and the soldier next to him had been one of his regular customers. I'm sure it was only a fleeting moment but Mr Cole remarked that although his fellow soldier never returned from the action he had often wondered what became of the German barber.

LONDON BOROUGH OF HILLINGDON

More cheerfully, another notable anniversary has been that of our own Urban District Council for it celebrates its Diamond Jubilee this year. It was formed on the 30th of September 1904 when the population was only around 3000 whereas now it's about 75000. A plaque commemorating the Jubilee was unveiled at Highgrove swimming pool this August.

Having just reached its 60th birthday it seems a shame that we are shortly going to lose our local Council as it is going to be submerged into a new London Borough with the formation of the GLC. I know that our Council wanted us to become part of Harrow but they lost this battle and we have been put with Hayes & Harlington, Uxbridge, Yiewsley and West Drayton. For some time we have just been called Borough 26 while people argued about an appropriate name, and I for one was quite relieved when the news came through in January that we weren't going to end up being called the London Borough of Uxbridge. At least Hillingdon is a fairly neutral name.

So with the London Borough of Hillingdon taking over next year, our current council never did get to build its own Town Hall. Haydon Hall was going to be the place for it at one time, and then Highgrove was earmarked for it. So now it's no longer needed for a civic building there's quite a debate going on about what the land and Highgrove House should be used for.

That other 'great house', Eastcote House, has been in a sorry site this year. Towards the end of the year it was being demolished and in the midst of this it looked just like a bombed building with one wall down so you could see where the fire places were on the first floor, and there were piles of rubble and fittings all over the outside. Even sadder was when the men burnt piles of timber too close to the house and set it alight. The fire brigade came and got the fire under control, but not until the first floor and the roof had been destroyed.

Lastly, with Eastcote House gone I'm hoping that Haydon Hall won't suffer the same fate. I hope it's a good omen that this year saw the formation of a new Society aiming to study and record the history of the area. Maybe they can also exert some influence on the powers that be to preserve some of our buildings and sites of historical importance.

In fact, having thought about it, I think I'm going to go along to the next meeting and join up to become a member! It will be interesting to see how this Society develops over the next few years.