

Wokingham Heritage Weekend

The Wokingham Society enjoyed an active role in celebrating Wokingham's heritage on Sunday, September 11th. Jim Bell, a local historian and member of the Society, was instrumental in helping to organise events and exhibitions in the Town Hall on the theme of the 1950s.

Jim set the tone of the day by dressing as a Teddy Boy while manning a stall in the Council Chamber displaying books and leaflets on local history written and published with Society support by local historians, the late Ken Goatley, Peter Shilham, John Harrison and Jim himself. He had also provided, amongst other exhibits, a comprehensive collection of pre-decimal coins and a working jukebox on which songs from the Fifties could be selected.

The Society's Blue Plaque Trail leaflet was prominently on display and visitors were encouraged to sample the trail for themselves. At the same time the Society's grant to St. Crispin's School towards the cost of restoring Fred Millet's mural in the entrance foyer was acknowledged by linking the theme of the day with the exhibition of the mural at the school, which was founded in the 1950s.

Visitors to the Town Hall were encouraged to visit St. Crispin's to admire the restoration, perhaps examining some of the buildings awarded a blue Plaque along the way. Similarly people who went directly to St. Crispin's were also made aware of events taking place concurrently in the Town Hall. Certainly all who saw the mural were greatly impressed and delighted that an important part of Wokingham's cultural heritage had been brought back to life thanks to the help provided by the Society.

The Town Hall staff all worked tirelessly to make the day a great success. Council Officers were dressed as Teddy Boys or in fashions from the 1950s. Splendidly attired in red, evoking the style and glamour of the same decade, Lady Godsall, Deputy Lieutenant of Berkshire and Patron of the Wokingham Society, arrived in a vintage Bentley. She then addressed the assembled gathering in the Market Place from the Town Hall balcony.

Perhaps the most eye-catching exhibit was the recreated 1950s room where the fashions, furniture and popular objects found in most homes of the period were displayed. Visitors looked nostalgically at the books, comics and magazines on display as well as many popular games played by families in the pre-digital age. They also stopped to view the video shown on a loop of the year 1956. Many of the older residents reminisced about their experiences in the decade and younger visitors listened to their parents or grandparents as they recalled memories of their own youth or, indeed, of their parents and grandparents.

Visitors were very impressed by the event and the Wokingham Society has every reason to be pleased with its contribution, not only to the exhibitions, but in helping to provide tours of All Saints and St. Paul's churches and churchyards organised by John Harrison and Jim Bell. John Harrison, a member of the Society, also organised tours of the All Saints bell tower while Ann Harrison took people on guided history walks in the town.

It is very much hoped the Society will continue to work closely with the Town Council in helping to organise future events celebrating the history and heritage of the town. It will also maintain the tradition of providing support to local individuals and organisations through the awarding of grants to appropriate projects.