

## **From the Lookout Post February 2016**

### **Caversham Businesses**

Changes continue up Prospect Street with the retirement of both Evelyn Burt at the Cristal Dragon and Ara Genjelian at Caversham Kebab House. Podiatrist, Evelyn Burt founded the Crystal Dragon as the Caversham Clinic in 2000 but expanded due to her interest in alternative medicine and healing crystals. Over time, facilities expanded to include different therapies, including massage, tarot card readings, yoga and meditation with a meditation garden. Its services have been very popular and have received many nominations for Reading Retail Awards. When the Caversham Festivals were held on the Westfield Triangle, Evelyn was the driving force for several events. She has done a lot for Caversham folk and we wish her well for the future.

Ara Genjelian set up the Caversham Kebab House 27 years ago. He and his wife Nora have served countless hungry folk and made a lot of friends. They now have decided to retire and the business closed in November. We wish Ara and Nora well for the future and look forward to news of their successors.

We hope there will soon be news of which parts of the redevelopment of the Church Street precinct can proceed, ending the uncertainty which is so difficult for local independent businesses.

### **WEA**

Some years ago Reading University announced the closure of its School of Continuing Education. A campaign including many Caversham residents began to try to persuade the University to change its mind, but to no avail. So a group of volunteers contacted the regional office of the Workers Educational Association (WEA), and after several meetings, a committee was formed to resurrect the then defunct local Branch. Local residents Paul and Carole Kingston had a central involvement; Paul was appointed Chairman of the branch and Carole took on much of the administration.

A varied programme of short and one day courses was established, on both topical and historical subjects, including many of particular local interest. The Reading branch grew steadily and is now one of the largest in the country.

Until recently, many courses were held at Hamilton Road. When this ceased to be available, many transferred to New Directions in Caversham – a boon to Caversham residents who no longer have to cross town, though it adds to the complexity of branch administration. The website, <http://wearereadingadulteducation.org.uk/> gives details of the current courses and how to book as well as opportunities to support the branch in its work.

Paul Kingston recently handed over the post of Chair to John Beale, while Carole continues to handle much of the administration. We congratulate both Paul and Carole on their continuing hard work and enthusiasm which has been central to such a popular and successful programme.

### **Conservation Areas**

On 24 November 2015, the Strategic, Environment, Planning and Transport Committee heard a report from Historic England and from the various community groups who have raised concerns about the deterioration in local Conservation Areas. The Russell Street/Castle Hill Conservation Area has experienced very severe problems and our local St Peter's Conservation Area has a range of problems in need of attention. In general, across Reading, there is a need to build awareness and local involvement and to put better measures in place to protect the special character of each area. Historic England are keen to promote community involvement and will be working with the Council and local groups. If you would like to support this process, please email [helen.lambert@cadra.org.uk](mailto:helen.lambert@cadra.org.uk).

### **Reading Abbey**

It was announced before Christmas that the *Reading Abbey Revealed Project* had secured funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). The project will enable the re-opening of the nationally important Abbey Ruins site to go ahead and its hidden heritage to be revealed. The £1.77 million HLF grant will be matched by a contribution of £1.38 million by the

Council. The project, totalling £3.15 million, will see an extensive programme of conservation works to the Abbey Ruins and Abbey Gateway. Accompanying this will be interpretation across the Abbey Quarter, a new display at Reading Museum and an exciting programme of activities extending beyond the opening of the site.

The current timetable for the project begins with the procurement of contractors for the conservation and interpretation works in March. Work on site will begin in September 2016, taking up to two years', with the site opening to the public in summer 2018. As a result of the project, three new specialist roles will be created and an Abbey volunteering programme will recruit 35 new volunteers to help with activities. The successful HLF award means the accompanying activity programme will continue beyond the opening, until the end of 2020.

You can find more information at [www.readingabbeyquarter.org.uk](http://www.readingabbeyquarter.org.uk), [www.facebook.com/ReadingAbbeyQuarter](https://www.facebook.com/ReadingAbbeyQuarter) or <https://twitter.com/RdgAbbey>.

### **The Reading Prison Archive**

Berkshire Record Office has been awarded a grant of £25,000 from the Wellcome Trust to preserve the historical archive of Reading Prison. The Wellcome Trust was keen to support the conservation because of the archive's importance for studying historical health care in a custodial environment.

The oldest document in the collection is a small volume dating from 1787, from the original gaol on the Forbury site. It contains notes made by the Berkshire magistrates who inspected the gaol. The book will be re-sewn and its cover recreated to match the original binding. The biggest conservation challenge is to repair a register of prisoners admitted between 1892 and 1894, so severely damaged by damp it cannot currently be opened. The grant will allow each page to be repaired and strengthened before the book is re-sewn into a new cover. Conservation work is planned to begin in April 2016, and it is hoped that all the repairs will be complete by January 2017.

## **Reading Borough Council Budgets**

In December, we learned that local services in the coming year could be further squeezed by funding cuts after the government gave Reading Borough Council and the other Berkshire Councils, a much worse financial settlement than expected. This may be as a result of the higher proportion of income from council tax and business rates.

The council estimates it now has to save an extra £5m in 2016-17, on top of the £39m of cuts it has made to its budgets for 2016 to 2019. The council has only until February 23 to decide how to make the £5m savings and agree its budget for 2016-17.

Please look out for consultations on how the additional cuts may be implemented at [www.reading.gov.uk/consultations](http://www.reading.gov.uk/consultations). A more detailed report on local library services is expected.

## **End of Life Care**

The public is being asked to give evidence on what kind of end-of-life care people receive in Reading. The group of 'End of Life Champions' aims to break the taboo preventing many people discussing with friends and family how they want to live the final part of their lives. A local event to coincide with *National Dying Matters Awareness Week* will be held in May 2016.

The group is seeking evidence – both good and bad – to help identify gaps in care as well as contribute ideas and preferences. They would like to hear from individuals, families and community groups, as well as organisations and professionals with an interest in end of life care; such as doctors, health care professionals, funeral directors, lawyers and spiritual and faith groups.

If you have an interest in this area and would like to get involved or be updated on progress, contact Jan Caulcutt on 0118 937 3358 or 07834 801338 or email [Jan.Caulcutt@Reading.gov.uk](mailto:Jan.Caulcutt@Reading.gov.uk)

