

THE ALTONIAN

ISSUE NUMBER 29 - WINTER 2009

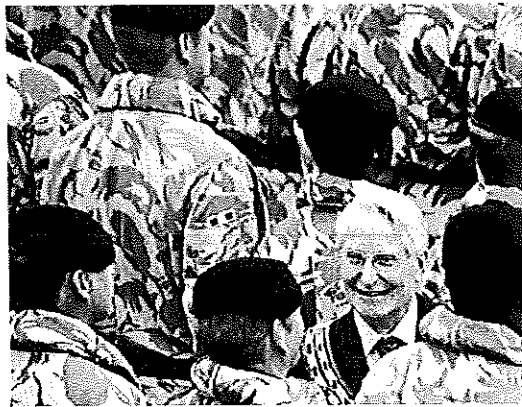
*The Official Newsletter of Alton Town Council -
published quarterly to keep you informed*

Seasonal Message from the Town Mayor

It is with much pleasure that I write to you at this very special time of year.

I cannot believe that six months have passed since I accepted the chain of office from my predecessor. When I was last Town Mayor twelve years ago, I remember thinking about how much I wanted to achieve during my term of office, but it appeared to be all over too soon, hence this time I have tried to be more focused to achieve my goals.

The word busy certainly describes the calendar this year: not only have we had the traditional activities that help mark the passing of time, but we were delighted to host the official Homecoming March of soldiers from Afghanistan and Kuwait who are based at nearby Bordon. I was heartened to see such a wonderful turnout from our community to welcome them and the great efforts that many businesses made to decorate their premises. I doubt there were many in the crowds who did not well-up inside with pride as they paraded by.



Cllr Allan Chick meets REME soldiers in Alton - full story inside on page 2 (photo courtesy Martin Saban-Smith)

Welcoming them into our community reminds us that these men and women are the loved ones of families, neighbours or friends who have voluntarily gone to distant lands to fight on our behalf, some giving the ultimate sacrifice. We also welcomed back a contingent to our traditional Service of Remembrance in November.

I would like to take this opportunity to mention some highlights of the summer months. I was particularly pleased to be asked to address the Jalsa Salana at East Worldham and to participate in the Centenary Celebrations of the Girl Guides. Along with the inauguration of Jane Austen's Brother's Rose Garden at Chawton House Library, these were just three of the many interesting

events which space does not allow me to mention here.

Christmas is of course a time for much joy and, having become grandparents again in the last few months, my wife Mary and I are particularly looking forward to spending time with our family over the festive season.

However, the decorations, celebrations and over-indulgences make it easy to forget that for many it can also be a very difficult and emotional time of the year, perhaps through illness, bereavement or loneliness. Remember it is not easy for all families to get together at this time, often through work, perhaps service abroad or just sheer distance; ironically, we all seem to be living further apart, even though the world we are told has got smaller!

So, as we spend our time in the coming weeks, let us not forget those less fortunate than we are, and honour the true spirit of Christmas.

May I take this opportunity to wish you all a peaceful and joyous Christmas and a healthy 2010.

Cllr Allan Chick

***** CHRISTMAS LIGHTS SWITCH-ON *****

Friday Nov 27th - MARKET SQUARE - from 5.50pm

*** LATE NIGHT SHOPPING * Thursday Dec 3rd - 'til 9pm**

*** YULE-TIDE FESTIVAL * Sunday 6th Dec - 10am to 4pm**

REME Ceremony seen from a young Altonian's perspective

On Thursday October 15th, the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers were publicly thanked and awarded medals in honour of their time in battle in Afghanistan and Iraq, writes *Kathryn Shaw of the Alton & District Youth Council*. Many people came to watch, including friends and families of the troops. The eventful day started with an RAF helicopter dramatically flying over Alton's High Street and, soon afterwards, the troops marching through the town led by the REME band.

The troops were introduced, thanked and welcomed to Alton by Cllr John Smith, the Chairman of East District Council, Cllr Allan Chick, Alton's Town Mayor, then personally welcomed them home. Each of the soldiers was then presented with medals for going into battle and serving in war zones. Many proud family members took pictures of their loved ones in the force; morale was high in Alton. One of REME's own Generals then congratulated the force and commended them for their brave efforts. During his speech he took time to remember those who lost their lives in battle. Alton was united in prayer for REME and those who lost their lives, before a wreath was laid beside the War Memorial.

As a young person of Alton, I found the day very moving. What I thought incredible was the fact that some of the troops had only returned home to Britain two days prior to the ceremony. I spoke to many inspirational people that day, including General Everard, who

commanded some of the REME troops in Iraq, and told me of the true dangers of war. This really brought home just how brave the REME troops have been. Many go to war, and tragically some never return, while others are injured. One inspirational young man with whom I was lucky enough to speak to was Mark Hancock, who was wounded on 9/9/09 and is now confined to a wheelchair. He was still able to come to the ceremony with a smile on his face, and has such determination that I believe it will help him through the next few months of recovery.

Captain Darren Wolfendale, the Director of Music for the REME band, told me of how they had just returned from the Red Square in Moscow, having represented Britain's forces all over the world. Although the men and women in the REME band may not give their lives in war zones, they play such a vital part in keeping spirits high, and I'm sure that everyone who came to see the ceremony was glad of their fabulous musical contributions.

To sum up my views on the day, I would like to use the words of a key individual: Deputy Lord Lieutenant Sir Roy Newman. When I spoke with him, he simply said: "This has been a very proud day for Alton, and a very proud day for Hampshire." I know those who would have felt the most proud that day were the incredible, inspirational and indispensable men and women of the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers.

Making things happen is what it's all about!

One of the best bits about being a councillor is making things happen. You do need to have a fair amount of patience as the wheels of government move very slowly, but every now and then an end comes into view.

It's been quite clear for some time that Alton needs more allotments. Just after I joined the town council two and a half years ago, Cllr Allan Chick suggested that we could easily fit a site in up on Greenfields, while still leaving plenty of open space for everyone to enjoy. A group of us from the council and the Allotments Association tramped around the field above Hawthorns and identified the best area. We then started the rather long and drawn-out process of making a concept into a reality.

We've needed a great deal of advice along the way from lots of different experts; we've had to secure the funding for the project from developers' contributions; and we've held a public consultation

to make sure that nothing was being overlooked and that you, the people of Alton, were supportive – which, on the whole, you were.

There were three main results from the public consultation. The first result was that most of the people who took part were fully in favour of the project and we received several comments along the lines of: "Just get on with it, will you!" The second result was to uncover the legitimate concerns of nearby residents. We took these concerns back to the experts who have been helping us, and they came up with one or two additions to the project which will meet those concerns.

The third result was slightly unexpected. Before the consultation, we had a waiting list for allotments of about 70 people; by the time we had finished, the list had grown to over a hundred. Fortunately, the site we have chosen already includes room for expansion!

So, where have we got to? The most recent meeting of the Recreation Committee agreed that the plan be adopted and our consultants should be given the go-ahead to prepare for tenders to be invited. I am very hopeful that we can now progress quite quickly to choosing a contractor and seeing the site opened in time for our new tenants to achieve at least one crop next year.

Making things happen is incredibly satisfying, especially when it's something that is directly helping local people. It's been a real team effort to get this project underway and I'm very grateful to all the people who have been involved, especially the members of the Allotments Working Party, both councillors and Allotment Association committee members, the Town Hall staff and the various experts, some of whom have given their time and advice free of charge.

Cllr Beverley Carpenter

Concerns expressed as the river runs dry

Water flow in the northern Wey through Alton has been well up for most of this year, but the dry summer with little rain to augment the falling water table has led to dry river beds through Alton, writes *Dr June Chatfield*

Gill and Mike Glover have noted no water at the source in the Will Hall Farm field since the



end of June. Low water levels have been noted in the river through Flood Meadows with the flow ceasing in September, since when the river bed has been dry in the Bank Car Park and alongside Costa Coffee in the High Street.

In Alton various people have voiced their concern over the low flow and dry river bed, and fears were expressed that the water company may again have been pumping from Wey Springs that, as a water source, had been shut down in 2003 as a result of the local river campaign. It was clearly necessary to find out the facts on what was happening, so I contacted Steve Barrow, Hydrogeologist at the Environment Agency in Frimley. He explained that there is no current

extraction licence for Wey Springs and abstracting would be illegal in this situation. He pointed out that the Wey Springs borehole is not on the list of abstraction sites in the present 5-year plan.

The current drying up of the river is due to weather conditions this summer and the time lag between autumn rain falling and it recharging the ground water supplies. In the same field as the water company's borehole is another commissioned by the Environment Agency for monitoring purposes. The Environment Agency operates gauging stations in the river at three sites in Alton and we will give some data from these in a forthcoming newsletter.

ALTON TOWN COUNCIL

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Full details of all of your Town, District and County Councillors (including their email and/or fax addresses) can be found on the Alton Town Council website, along with a full range of essential local phone numbers and useful points of contact

Town Partnership update

In the last *Altonian*, we wrote about future housing in Alton (part of the Core Strategy) and about your responses to the ideas developed for regenerating the area around our Railway Station. Since then the Alton Town Partnership has been busy following up on the Station Approach project and working in partnership with other organisations around town on more projects.

Station Approach Regeneration

The working group has taken fully on board your wishes that the architectural character of any scheme must reflect in appearance, building size and construction quality, the nature of Alton and its standing as a caring and environmentally responsible 21st century market town. Some residents living close to the area have expressed real concern about similar issues and we are encouraging them, and would encourage others, to form a community group that will have direct input in future discussions. If you want more information on this group, please contact us or go directly to Jon Furley (jon@jonfurley.co.uk)

Many of you will have caught wind that Lidl is considering a presence in the area, and other development companies have also expressed an interest in working with the stakeholders on different elements of any future scheme. ATP (along with Alton Town Council and East Hampshire District Council) is happy to consider such approaches but we will have to be sure that they will be right for Alton. The Partnership will make sure that at every step along you will all be kept informed, consulted and involved. Contact Chris McCallum for further information.

Public Involvement

The Partnership is committed to more and more Altonians being involved in planning the future of our community. We've now got funding to begin a pilot project (the first in Hampshire) through which people in individual communities within the town can get the training and support that will help them organise and carry out 'professional' research surveys. These surveys will provide evidence of individual community hopes and needs. Such information gives communities a real voice and can really help to make things happen. We are here to help you make needed change happen - this is why the project is called Community Action Research. You could make a real difference right where it matters most, in the place where you live. If you're interested in learning new skills, working when it suits you and earning something in the process please get in touch with Chris McCallum: chrism@alton-in-partnership.org or call 01420 549684.

Big Draw

On October 24th, in partnership with Alton Buckle, we put on 'Big Draw Alton Goes Large'. A host of mums and dads, boys and girls, brothers and sisters, friends and neighbours came to the Michael Gray Art Building at Alton College on Saturday and took part in what we think was the biggest ever 'Big Draw' in Alton.

All day long, there wasn't a single face that wasn't smiling. And all day long the pictures kept coming; all speaking volumes about what a great place Alton is, and how proud we can all be of the town we live in. You will find every single picture on Facebook, by searching for Alton Big Draw, and we'll also be creating a proper gallery on www.altonbigdraw.co.uk.

We'd also like to turn one or more of our empty High Street shops into a live gallery showing a selection of the pictures. Other towns have used temporary displays of community art to fill bleak, empty spaces and found that this helps shops to be sold or leased more quickly than if they're left empty. Hampshire County Council and EHDC are keen to support such projects. All we need is the space. Seems like a win - win to us, so if there's anybody out there with an empty shop or two who can help us we'd like to hear from you.

Christmas Lanterns

Our next fun community happening will be the fourth Alton Lantern Procession in December. With Alton Buckle we're running a series of lantern-making workshops during the early part of December with the procession much nearer Christmas itself. Look out for more news on dates and times, very soon. We're looking for any adults interested in learning how to make lanterns so that they can help us run the workshops - the more helpers, the more workshops, the more lanterns; the more lanterns there are, the more fun the procession will be. And who knows, there might even be a party at the end of the procession!

For more information contact Alison Cliffe: alison.cliffe@bushyleaze.hants.sch.uk, tel: 01420 87675, or Chris McCallum (details as above).

Twining for all seasons

As I look back on a successful year for the Alton Town Twining Association, it is perhaps quite remarkable that several of our biggest events will take place over the next couple of months.

By the time this issue hits the streets, Italian maestro Antonio Camponogara will have wowed the audience at the Alton College Forum with his magnificent piano playing, and I sincerely hope that many readers will have taken note of Tonie Ronane's article on this subject in the last *Altonian*.

The official visit to our Italian twin town of Montecchio Maggiore took place in May when, in glorious sunshine, we enjoyed the splendour of their Romeo and Juliet pageant, and then the next day wondered at the architectural brilliance of the historic town of Mantova.

Having suffered the vagaries of the English summer on their trip to Alton in 2007, friends from Pertuis, our twin in the south of France, have opted this year to enjoy Alton in its Christmas apparel with a visit from December 3rd-7th. We shall be especially pleased to welcome Roger Pellenc, who was elected Mayor of Pertuis in May 2008, for his first visit to Alton; the official reception being held in the Town Hall at 10am on Friday December 4th. Saturday will be taken up by a full day trip to London, allowing our guests to take in the festive atmosphere and perhaps top up their Christmas shopping baskets. Personally I am looking forward to the Yuletide Festival on the Sunday, when our guests will be joining ATTA members on stalls in the High Street and dispensing samples of Christmas specialities from Provence. Perhaps there will also be a few verses from typical regional carols. Our final celebration will be an English Christmas dinner at the Lasham Gliding Club, then all too soon our guests will return home the next morning, I am sure taking with them fond memories of pleasure given and received by the people of Alton.

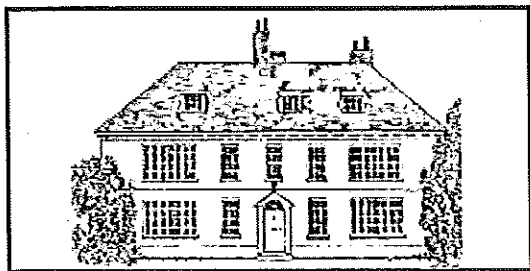
We in ATTA strive to offer a range of social, cultural and sporting activities, full details of which are available on our website www.altontwining.hampshire.org.uk. Do feel free to contact me personally via the Town Hall or by phone on Alton 88834. New members are always welcome, or you could come along and sample our atmosphere by joining our New Year luncheon at the Alton House Hotel on Sunday January 3rd. Young people are a special ATTA focus, largely through links with Alton College and various schools, but more of this another time.

David Willoughby

Chairman, Alton Town Twining Association

Seasonal greetings
from the Town Hall

Impressive programme developing for Andrews'



Andrews' Endowed Primary School in Holybourne launched a major fundraising season in October with a free concert by the Alton Concert Orchestra at Eggar's School.

The Andrews' Endowed Development Trust committee has been working hard over the summer, compiling a calendar of events to help raise the money required to complete the funding for two new classrooms at the school. Ninety percent of the building cost will be provided through the Diocese, with the governors of the school responsible for finding the remaining ten percent. Some of the money needed has already been forthcoming, but there is still a shortfall of around £30,000 to be covered.

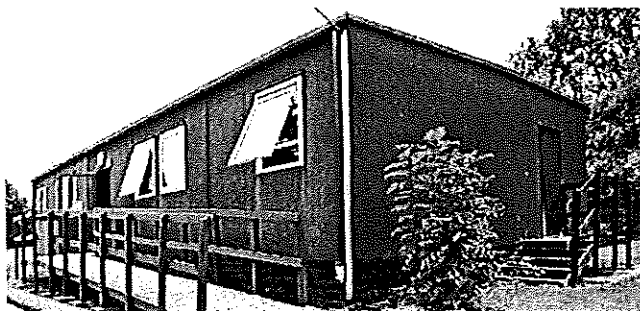
On the agenda so far are dinners, cinema nights, history evenings and sponsored events, and the whole community is invited to join in.

"We can't raise all of the £30,000 at the school gate," stressed Martin Saban-Smith, Chair of the fundraising committee, "so we decided to put together a calendar of events that should interest and excite a wider audience. Rather than do the 'usual' school fundraising activities, we've taken it one or two steps further. We've become almost an events organising group which raises money on a community level, by providing a range of activities that go beyond the normal sponsorship events."

The funding needs to be secured by the end of this academic year, and the free launch concert at Eggar's School provided an excellent platform from which the committee could begin to raise awareness of their campaign. "It allowed us to meet members of the community to explain what we are doing, and to provide them with details about the building project," said Mr Saban-Smith.

"We are very excited about the prospect of building these much-needed new classrooms at Andrews' Endowed School," enthused Headteacher, Maria Lloyd. "The mobile classrooms are coming to the end of their natural life and our aim is to replace them with two purpose-built, bright and modern classrooms for our younger children."

To help the cause there is a dedicated website that has details of all the upcoming events, including online ticket booking, building plans and easy to use donation buttons. In addition local businesses have the opportunity to help sponsor events and place an advert on the site, or in the regular newsletter from the committee. To find out more, visit www.andrewsendowedfundraising.co.uk.



Out with the old mobiles, and in with the new classrooms at Andrews'

On-line Assembly information

In the seven months since the Town Council took the management of the Assembly Rooms back in-house, a few visible changes and improvements have been made.

"The building is a wonderful resource for the council, town and the residents, but it would appear that there are still a few people who have never been in the building or are even aware of the many activities that take place within it," explained Assembly Rooms Manager, Jason Passingham. "The first project that I undertook after my appointment was to have the lower room refurbished, making it a far more open, light and airy space that is now suitable for conferences, rehearsals or even art exhibitions.

"A number of leaflets have also been produced that not only show our many user groups and how you can become a member of them, but also a guide that shows what is going on. All of these leaflets have proved to be very popular, and further ones are currently being designed for publication.

"I can honestly say that my first few months working here have flown by, and that I have been made to feel so welcome by the residents of Alton," concluded a beaming Mr Passingham.

Copies of all the leaflets produced can be found at the Assembly Rooms and on their new group page on Facebook, with a regularly updated what's on listing featured on Alton Town Council's website, www.alton.gov.uk

Don't bet your hedges...

Hedges, fences and boundaries have long been a source of dispute and frustration for many otherwise placid neighbours. However, when they're right next to the highway, whether it's a road or a footpath, it can involve the authorities too.

There is a common misconception that fences and hedges next to a highway must be the responsibility of the highway authority - but in practice the reverse is more often the case. As a general rule of thumb, ask yourself: is the fence, hedge, embankment or retaining wall there for the benefit of the highway and its users, or for the adjoining landowner? If the structure is there to retain the highway, then it's down to the highway authority (in our case Hampshire County Council) to maintain; however if it's there to maintain adjoining land or provide privacy for landowners, then it's that landowner who has the responsibility. This includes ensuring that any fences or hedges don't present any difficulties to highway users, so if your hedge is a tad overgrown or your fence is leaning over onto the pavement, then winter's a great time to take some action and get everything sorted out before the spring.

For details on all matters relating to highways, including the responsibilities of landowners with properties next to roads and paths, contact Hampshire Highways East on 0845 603 5633.

Don't keep quiet about events

Are you holding an event in Alton? Then tell people about it! Sometimes you are so busy organising it that you forget to spread the word, but help is at hand. You can -

- * Use the www.altonevents.co.uk website
- * Drop ten A4 sized portrait posters into the Town Hall to go on council / car park notice boards (but not the day before the event please!)
- * Give posters to the information office in Cross & Pillory Lane, the Library and Alton Community Centre
- * Also, if you know about it early enough, use *The Altonian!*

2009/10 Town Calendar

Date	Event	Time	Venue
Fri 27/11	Christmas Lights Switch-on	5.50pm	Market Square
Sun 06/12	Yuletide Festival	10-4pm	Town Centre
2010			
Sun 17/01	The Princess and The Pea	3pm	Assembly Rooms