

Horsham Society

with Oliver Farley



Thriving future in the new age

Do you remember the seedsman's shop in East Street or the smell of steam trains in the station while looking out over the medieval farm building opposite?

Perhaps not everyone does but certainly everyone can observe how rapidly our town is changing; there's change in size, in content, in employment and socially.

Horsham, in common with many a rural town of its size, had a structured appearance up to about 30 years ago.

There were the traditional families with local well known names, there were the wholesalers and retailers supplying the nearby farming industry, and the jewellers and clothiers attracting the scattered communities into the town.

This aspect of supporting the rural community was complemented by significant industry and offices.

There was a definite layering of social and economic structures across the townscape and population composition.

Much of that has gone, been replaced or altered out of recognition.

Some businesses have very recently withdrawn from the town – Novartis – others expanded and contracted over the years.



The Causeway in Horsham in the 1950s

Yet Horsham retains its air of thriving prosperity; it is still a good place to live and its expanding numbers prove the point.

Perhaps if we were to take just one development as symptomatic of how the town has altered and adjusted over those recent decades then it would be the expansion in the presence of estate agents.

Several of our local names have spread all over the South-East and many new names have joined in. The demand for housing has rarely been higher and the town has spread out into areas once decidedly peripheral.

With this change has come a shift in population and its composition. The established role of more traditional

groups has been supplanted by an influx of newcomers, many to work in the new and very different jobs of an electronic age, many to commute to places so far away that they were once considered vastly remote.

The M25 made commuting to counties 40, 50 or a hundred miles away a distinct possibility and these outlandish daily journeys are now being replaced by e-commerce, e-professions and e-contact on a global scale. It no longer matters where you are physically, you can be in your office any where in the world, day or night, as the moment demands.

For the older members of society these changes are hard to comprehend still less

to master but the pace of change is already speeding onwards to new terrain and untested territory.

We're getting used to having all our social data on a phone in our pocket, to accessing friends, family, bank and colleagues at a key stroke. The time looms when there will be physical consequences for ourselves and our town when, for example, e-commerce becomes the norm.

What will the future be for our now new supermarket/department stores, when screens will display all the goods we need and ordering will be a click from the armchair? What will then be the social structure of our town? Will it still even be a town?

On balance I think it will. It's development into a residential and recreational town, with street life and restaurants will keep it thriving into that strange future just as it had over its settled past.

The Horsham Society is concerned about the past, present and future of the town. It seeks to promote good planning and design for the built environment and open spaces. Membership of the Horsham Society is open to anyone who shares these concerns. For more information, visit the website www.horshamsociety.org or phone 01403 272814.