

PREFATORY NOTE

The direction of the planning and administration of the development of an historic borough into a new town, through the establishment of Hemel Hempstead Development Corporation (see the inside back cover), was in the hands of no less a personality than Lord Reith; who had not only been founder Director General of the B.B.C. but who also had chaired the Committee on the Building of New Towns which had published their findings in the Reith Report. In it they set out the nature of the task of the creators of the new towns; ending with these words: "Our responsibility is to conduct an essay in civilisation by seizing the opportunity to design, evolve and carry into execution for the benefit of the generations to come, the means for a happy and gracious way of life. It is in that spirit that we approach our task."

To do this, the master plan for Hemel Hempstead was based on the establishment of a number of neighbourhoods varying in population according to the size of the areas determined by the natural features of the landscape. Happily the main geographical and topographical features of the old borough were entirely suited to the realisation of the theories of the social planners. The chief of which was that while the new town should have a distinctive character as a civic and corporate entity (hopefully retaining the best of the old, and incorporating the better of the new) its people should be housed in individually identifiable areas. These were to encourage and enable them to develop a sense of close neighbourliness, and a feeling of being part of a community which afforded them realistic opportunities for building on sound foundations laid down when the time came for them to make their own contribution to a new heritage.

The site chosen for the initial development - of Adeyfield and the adjacent industrial area - was the plateau on the hill to the east of the town centre. It was agricultural land with several farms and a few smallholdings. Fourteen roads contained the existing domestic housing, and these varied in length from the short cul-de-sac Adeyfield Gdns. to the long Leverstock Green Road and High Street Green, which ran in a straight north-south line, and Adeyfield Rd. which ran from their junction to the northern end of the town and the southern end of the old High Street.

REMINDER

The numbering of these notes is that used in the leaflet giving the route of the walk; but walkers will surely be attracted by and curious about features not mentioned here. The Chairman of the Local History Society who has prepared these notes would be happy to try to answer any enquiries.

1: It was thought that a royal visit to a new town would be a significant way to mark the beginning of a new reign; one which it was hoped would herald a New Elizabethan Age. So it was that Queen Elizabeth II came to Hemel Hempstead in July 1952, not long after her accession and before her coronation. The choice was entirely appropriate, for the first considerable expansion and upsurge in the prosperity of the town in the 16th century resulted from the grant of a charter by King Henry VIII, whose daughter was to give her name to a period of national prosperity and power - the first Elizabethan Age. The primary purpose of her visit was to lay the foundation stone of St. Barnabas Church.

The New Elizabethan Age has not come about, nor were the dreams of the builders of the new town to be realised in full; but it is well that the heritage walk should start in the Neighbourhood Centre whose name commemorates that visit. And well that we should remember that it was to be a symbolic gesture of acknowledgement - from the Head of the Church of England - of the continuing importance of the spiritual force which should motivate the ways whereby the material needs of everyday life are met.

The discrepancy between dreams and reality are to be seen at the very beginning - and with St. Barnabas Church. For the campanile clock tower, which was to be a feature of it was not built. Nor did the Italian piazza paving and the fountain materialise. However, there to meet the day to day needs of life are the 32 shops on the east and north sides of the Square. But it surely represents a strange understanding of what comprise day to day needs to find that the premises above the branch library now accommodates a firm which imports parts of a product from Sweden, and assembles and packages them for mail order sale. A betting shop had previously occupied the premises. This has now moved to the north-east corner - to be near Securicor?