

THE year now passing—the first full year of "Peace"—has witnessed a great deal of activity in all departments of the Borough's life. Though life, to-day, is bound with many restrictions, interest in local affairs has, during the past 12 months proved to be "unrationed." Here, from the files of the Christchurch Times is

THE STORY OF THE BOROUGH'S 1946

(C.T. December 28, 1946)

1946 has been a year in which most things have flourished—except apathy. Only in the matter of local elections has this chilling hand of inactivity held its sway. For the rest, having accustomed ourselves to refraining from raising our eyebrows with a bang when we hear the price of things, all—including the Council, organisations, societies, clubs, shops, offices and factories have, for the most part, been busily occupied in the affairs of our small community.

January.

Looking back through the files of the year provides an indication of the vast amount that has happened during this first complete year of peace. Many of the events and developments now almost consigned to the limbo of past history did not appear as news prior to the beginning of 1946. In January for instance, daylight lighting was only a vague promise, and some of the terms of the Abercrombie report were merely the subject of a forecast in an early January issue of the Christchurch Times. At this time too, first news of the building of the Airspeed Ambassador, the large twin-engined transport plane, was made public.

The early days of the New Year saw a continuance of party, dance, and other festivity which, during the year, has grown to a crescendo of social activity fittingly marking the return to peace. One of the most notable functions was the reception given at Highcliffe Castle by the Honourable Mrs. C. Stuart Wortley, C.B.E., to celebrate the end of the war and her eightieth birthday anniversary.

The knighthood of Sir Donald Bailey was announced in the New Year's Honours List—at a time when the Bridging Establishment was fighting a battle to keep open communication through which the B.A.O.R. and Germany's hungry population were then depending for initial supplies.

The inaugural meeting of the Christchurch Old People's Welfare Association was held on the 15th of the month.

Housing progress, which has naturally provided one of the most constant and increasing sources of interest through the year, had its start with the arrival of parts of the first three pre-fabricated houses in Melbourne Road. The first three of these dwellings were erected by the end of the month.

February.

The Borough Council has had many talks, on this question of housing, with Regional and Central Government Authorities during the year. The first, and one of the most important, of these was when four delegates from Christchurch Council went to meet Mr. Aneurin Bevan at Southampton on the first of the month. Although the Minister of Health was helpful, the Christchurch delegation had one of its earliest emphatic reminders that they would have to keep in line with Government housing policy.

The C.C.A.—and also the H.C.A.—have been vigilant in 1946. The first complaint they had to make concerned the Council's decision to close the Town Hall for dances on Saturday night—a decision later reversed.

The Council were also criticised by the Christchurch Cricket Club for their unwillingness to

maintain a pitch on the Recreation Ground.

The Abercrombie report, prepared after two years' work, was presented to a joint meeting of the Christchurch, Bournemouth and Poole Councils on February 13th. It proposed little alteration for Christchurch. One of its recommendations—the provision of a main road from the silent policeman to Tuckton—has already been abandoned by the Council, which has still not committed itself to any opinion on one of the Professor's other recommendations—the building of a new Town Hall.

Highcliffe, always and naturally anxious about its cliff top, was roused by an announcement this month that part of this land might be sold to a private purchaser for "development."

March.

Following up this protest about the cliff top, Highcliffe Citizens' Association turned to the question of a fun fair there and their local memorial. The form of the borough's memorial has been a matter for contention ever since the starting of a "Lest We Forget" Fund. The committee for the borough decided on, and is proceeding with the collection of funds for, the building of homes for disabled ex-service men. A preference exists in Highcliffe or at least in a large section of Highcliffe—for a memorial of more direct appeal to the village, and a recreation park has been suggested.

The final word of the H.C.A. at this time was contained in a letter from their then secretary, Mr. Carlos, who wrote to the Mayor:

"I can assure you that the "Lest We Forget" Fund Committee will have the full and whole-hearted support of this association as soon as it adopts a scheme which represents the wishes of this village. As already mentioned, this is not the case with the present form the memorial is to take, and it is undoubtedly one of the main contributing factors to the serious lack of support of the fund in this area."

Until a reference appeared in the Christchurch Times to the facilities available from the Public Works Loans Board few people apparently realised that the local Council could make arrangements to advance money for the purchase of house property.

The Council decided in the following month to offer these facilities but unfortunately the national housing policy has prevented use of them being made.

Mr. David Llewellyn was voted to the Hampshire County Council, polling 1,159 votes against 775 secured by his opponent, Coun. Stanley Kermode.

April.

An increase of 3/- in the rate was necessary to absorb a Hampshire County increase of 2/4 and the balance of 8d. for our own domestic budget. This departure from the policy of stabilising the rate was inevitable, not only on account of increased costs, wages, etc., but to provide for some of the development which had been held up during war years. Judging from the latest County Council announcements it would appear most probable that the rate will be increased again next April.

As the attention of the Government has been focussed in turn on the various industries and services they considered to be in need of reorganisation, so protests have arisen from those likely to be affected by the new policies. In April the National Health Bill produced a spate of meetings throughout the country; and the Radio Doctor, Dr. Charles Hill, addressed a crowded meeting at the Bournemouth Town Hall. A meeting in Christchurch this month, arranged by the C.C.A., had Mr. Ross Smith to set out the grounds of the B.M.A.'s opposition to the scheme. The Government's attitude was supported by Coun. Dr. R. A. Lyster, of Bournemouth, at a meeting of the H.C.A.

At the annual parochial meeting the Rev. R. P. Price, M.A., referred to the financial burdens they would have to face. At this meeting also a practice which had aroused considerable adverse comment was abandoned—that of charging a fee for visiting the Nave of the Priory Church.

Following the announcement that June 8th was to be the date of official Victory celebration, private enterprise quickly decided to atone for the decision that the borough would organise no official celebrations beyond the United Thanksgiving Service in the morning. The promise made in April by enthusiasts were amply fulfilled when the day came.

May.

The first pre-fabs. were ready for occupation in Melbourne Road at the beginning of May.

The process of bringing the Council's housing policy into line with the Ministry of Health's requirements received considerable attention this month. Later in the year the accumulation of difficulties brought the Regional Housing Officer down from Reading to a meeting of the Council at a private session which ironed out some of the misunderstandings and criticisms levelled by local councillors at the Government's housing officials. Part of the discontent arose from the turning down of a proposal Christchurch put forward for the building of 160 permanent prefabricated bungalows. "The Ministry would not carry the can" was how one councillor voiced his opinion of the real reason for this refusal. On the other hand, one of the useful steps taken to harness building capacity was represented by the calling of a meeting of all builders and representatives of the building trade in Christchurch to hear details of a plan enabling them to co-operate with the Government through the local Council. By December more than a dozen local builders had joined in with this scheme and were busily putting up houses for the local authority.

School building received its share of attention with the promise from the County of two new schools announced towards the end of the month.

The Mayor and Mayoress, Ald. and Mrs. D. Galton, were received by the King and Queen on the occasion of the Royal visit to Winchester on the 17th.

June.

The new headquarters of the Christchurch Branch of the British-Legion were opened on June 1st. The ambitious decision of this Branch to acquire the Rialto Hall in Bargates has obviously been more than justified by the record of its progress during the year.

The year's weather, almost uniformly unkind in the extreme, did its best to drown the ardour with which Victory Day was celebrated on the 8th. Enthusiasm triumphed, however, in making this, the third "V Day," the best of all so far as the Central and Jumpers Wards were concerned.

The Labour Party Rally held on the Recreation Ground provided, amongst other things, a "day out" for the kiddies on the 15th.

The development of the borough's amenities has been an ideal taking up much of the Council's attention during the past year. A special committee of the Council was elected in June to go into this matter with a view to raising money for the reduction of rates, and by October the committee had produced a substantial list of developments to be put in hand as and when circumstances permitted. Many of these proposals had already been suggested after earlier investigations by the borough's Citizens' Associations and the Chamber of Trade.

Recognition for three more residents of the borough was recorded in the King's Birthday Honours List by the award of the M.B.E. to Mr. B. M. Furneaux, and the B.E.M. to Mr. Percy Button and Mr. J. H. Broombridge for their work at the Bridging and Signals Research Establishments.

July.

The energy with which the goal of housing progress was pursued during the early part of the year was even accelerated during the latter half. Acting on a statement made by the Ministry of Health in Southampton in February, the Christchurch Council by-passed the principal Housing Officer and wrote straight to Mr. Bevan on the 28th June, telling him of the difficulties which were

said to be preventing the building of houses in the borough. Resulting from this letter the Regional Officer, Mr. Williams, subsequently had a full day's discussion with the Council, from which it was apparent that the faults were not limited to one party.

The scheme of allocating points to housing applicants was amended in July on account of the partial breakdown of the system originally evolved. The Town Clerk and members of the Council pointed out the difficulties of checking statements made on application forms and it was resolved, this month, not to disclose the system by which points were allocated but to pay greater attention to need.

The Council's plans to run a municipal camping ground on Bernard's Mead were first announced at the July Council meeting and brought forth a petition, signed by more than 70 persons living in the vicinity, against the proposition. The plans were suspended, as was announced in the Christchurch Times at the beginning of August, after a writ had been issued on the Corporation with the object of securing an injunction to restrain them from using part of the Mead as a holiday camp site.

Old people's welfare has always been a matter of considerable concern to the borough in general and to the Christchurch Citizens' Association in particular. The project to use "Homelands" has been fostered by the Citizens' Association and a step towards the organisation of the scheme was made in July when a committee decided to form a Housing Society for the purchase of "Homelands."

The announcement of the private sale of Avon Beach was made at the end of the month.

August.

Having lost the opportunity of purchasing Avon Beach, the Christchurch Corporation got into touch with the new owners with the view of acquiring it, but nothing came of the negotiations.

The conference with Mr. T. S. Williams, the Ministry of Health's principal Housing Officer at Reading, took place in the Council Chamber on Tuesday, August 20th. The question of the admission of the Press was raised; but as both sides felt they wanted to engage in some "extremely plain speaking" it was decided to have the meeting behind closed doors. Both the Council and Mr. Williams afterwards expressed their satisfaction with the progress that had been made in the ironing out of difficulties. One of the improvements suggested was that letter-writing should be cut out and the advantages of personal contact and conversation pursued.

August was noteworthy for a highly successful Regatta and a highly ambitious Horse Show. Had the weather been as favourable for the Horse Show as it was one week previously for the Regatta, the Show, too, would undoubtedly have achieved great financial success.

It is interesting to recall that Bournemouth has, not long ago, showed an interest in adopting the name of "Hampshire Henly" for their own Regatta—an idea which has, quite properly, aroused considerable objection in Christchurch, which has used this appellation, and justified it, for very many years.

The town's Regatta also had a successful counterpart in one staged by M.E.X.E.

A review of the year would be incomplete without some comment on the weather, which has left everything to be desired. It was one of the worst gales and storms of the year, which wrecked the Horse Show.

September.

A feature of war, and post-war development in Christchurch, encouraged by the housing shortage, has been the increasing use of camping sites. From time to time these have been criticised or supported by parties whose interests were either outside of, or within, these camping sites. Reference was made to the matter in the annual report of the Medical Officer, Dr. C. Conyers Morrell, who quoted a statement by the borough Sanitary Inspector "regretting that under existing legislation the Council have no power to withdraw or cancel a licence once granted." This limitation

of power has been brought to the notice of the Ministry of Town and Country Planning, who promised that it would receive consideration.

The housing conference was quickly followed by the announcement made at the beginning of September that the first six of the schemes by which local builders would co-operate with the Council were already in operation.

The need for improved bus services has been frequently discussed by the Council and the borough's Citizens' Associations. In September the Council passed a motion asking Bournemouth Corporation and the Hants and Dorset Bus Company to supply a service for the Jumpers area.

At this month's meeting of the Council the important matter of the admission of the Press to Council Committee Meetings was discussed and it was resolved unanimously that representatives of the Press should be admitted to meetings of the Council in Committee, subject to the Council's right to ask them to withdraw whenever, owing to the special nature of the business being dealt with, or about to be dealt with, they considered the exclusion of the Press was advisable in the public interest. This matter had been brought to a head by criticism of the Christchurch Council for having held a full meeting to discuss the Bernard's Mead writ without giving any notice to public or Press and without issuing any subsequent official statement.

October.

A preliminary announcement of the financial result of the August Horse Show and Pony Racing disclosed that the respective surpluses might be about £287 and £10, subject to recovery of excise duty. It seems likely that the final result may prove to be even less satisfactory.

Details of a £38,000 scheme for the development of Highcliffe's beach were made public at the Annual Meeting of the Highcliffe Citizens' Association. It was explained by the chairman of the Beach Committee that there was no hope whatever of carrying out the work for a long time, but the plans displayed indicated an attractive layout for Highcliffe's front — provided the nature of the terrain renders the scheme practicable. A successful first year of work by the Highcliffe Citizens' Association was reviewed at this Annual Meeting.

Another annual event to attract considerable interest was the holding of ploughing matches and agricultural competitions by the 152-year-old South Avon and Stour Agricultural Society, the oldest society of its kind in the country. There were more than 70 entries for the competitions, with admirable support for the tractor, horse ploughing and hedging competitions. At the annual dinner held at the King's Arms Hotel, 152 farmers of the district were entertained — one for each year of the Society's existence.

The development of various other of the borough's amenities was fore-shadowed in the recommendations of the Amenities Committee presented to the Christchurch Council at its October meeting. Suggestions for the development of Stanpit Marshes later raised considerable opposition.

The removal of the R.A.F. from Holmsley South, which operation occupied the early winter months, aroused the interest of house-hungry families—particularly at Messrs. Airspeed's factory. The Councils of Christchurch and Ringwood also kept their eyes fixed on developments which might leave hutments available for housing purposes on this large aerodrome. An Airspeed's committee was formed in October to watch developments.

November.

At the November Municipal Elections, the Labour candidates achieved no success in the four wards of the Borough. Three retiring Councillors were re-elected and Mr. George Furneaux, successful in the Jumpers area, topped the poll with nearly 900 votes. The proportion of the electorate that went to the polls showed a decrease at 36.8 per cent, as compared with the 41¼ per cent. voting at the 1945 elections.

Councillor Slinn was unanimously elected Mayor of the Borough at the Council's Annual meeting, taking the place of Alderman D. Galton, who had been either Mayor or Deputy-Mayor,

over a period of 11 years. In the course of his address, the new Mayor looked forward to an extremely busy year of Council work in which attention to the housing problem would figure very largely. Councillor Slinn, as the previous chairman of the Housing Committee, is in an unequalled position to handle this matter from the Mayoral chair.

During the year there have been a number of changes in the membership of the Council. The Borough has lost the services of Aldermen Oakley, Stevens and Cawte, and Councillors Howe and Wright; the newcomers include Councillors Furneaux, Hawkins and Ashcroft.

The Christchurch and District Chamber of Trade took a hand in the efforts to secure improved bus services by inviting Alderman A. Langton, chairman of the Bournemouth Transport Committee, to address a meeting of traders this month. Alderman Langton disclosed details of the agreement between the Bournemouth Corporation and the Hants and Dorset Bus Company by which the former were restrained from running bus services over any routes outside the Corporation's existing area over which the Hants and Dorset buses are, for the time being, running. The Christchurch Citizens' Association subsequently invited a representative of the Hants and Dorset Bus Company to address them, but the invitation was declined, Mr. D. W. Morrison, their Traffic Manager, stating that his company preferred to deal through the representatives of the local authority. There the matter rests for the time being; but it is believed that further conversations are being pursued in an effort to secure necessary improvements, some of which have already been introduced by the Hants and Dorset Bus Company which are of benefit to the Jumpers area.

December.

The announcement that the Council had taken over part of the accommodation at Holmesley Aerodrome was made at the beginning of December. It was stated that Nissen huts were available for about 400 people, and within a matter of hours the Ringwood and Fordingbridge Rural District Council had installed families in the ex-W.A.A.F. accommodation allocated to them. Work was speedily begun by the Christchurch Council, converting their accommodation ready for civilian occupation.

A most interesting exhibition was staged at the Town Hall by the Christchurch Science Club in the early part of the month. This was followed by the announcement that the Chamber of Trade Executive Committee were calling a meeting of all the Borough's manufacturers and industrialists to consider the possibility of organising a "Christchurch Can Make It" Exhibition in the New Year.

His Worship the Mayor was made an Alderman at the December Council meeting. Thanking the Council for the honours they were "heaping upon him (he was elected Mayor in the previous month) Alderman Slinn promised to do all he could "for the service of this Council and the community in which we live." His Worship's progress through the offices of the Council has been remarkable. He was originally co-opted in September, 1943, and elected in November, 1945.

A slight indication of the greatly increased amount of work being done by the Council now in contrast to a year or two ago when 25-minute or half-hour Council meetings were not uncommon, was provided by the December meeting, which lasted approximately 4 hours. In the course of a lengthy statement as the new chairman of the Housing Committee, Coun. Bingham hoped the new year would be a "main year of offensive" in which the borough's badly housed people would come into their own.

And so, in the last month of the year as in the first, attention was being focussed on the housing problem—perhaps the biggest single problem of our time, not only in the Borough of Christchurch but over the whole of Britain.