

Power to the People!

Fiona Roche looks through old issues at the people behind the News....

AT *The Stage* newspaper where I worked a few years ago the editor often reminded us hacks that the paper was 'primarily a journal of record' – not, as we sometimes liked to think, simply a ticket to free champagne receptions and theatre seats and a vehicle for juicy stories about prima donna actors.

What he meant was that the paper is there to serve its readers – to be entertaining and informative, but crucially to record the industry's triumphs and disappointments for today and for posterity.

Triumphs

Reading through all 39 back issues of *Hilltop News*, I realise that since she put together the first newsletter in June 1996, this is what Joan Gower has done for this community. She has produced a journal of record charting the history of Hilltop over the past ten years for of all of you out there who read it and for the benefit of generations to come.

Among the reams of useful information and amusing tales there are stories of local triumphs. There have been battles

fought vociferously by residents and won, such as the successful campaign by Sylvia Evans and her neighbours' in '97 to save the post bus from being axed. And in '98 there's Tony Pringle and the parish council's triumph over pot-holes in the roads that resulted in much-needed repairs being carried out and a promise of more regular road checks. Then there's HCA's success in 2002 after a two-year long appeal to get charity status. The highs and lows of each case recorded in the pages of *Hilltop News*.

It's good to see that solidarity wins through. As Robert Lindsay used to say in *Citizen Smith: Power to the People!*

Everyday life

Other colourful pictures emerge of everyday life in Hilltop and there are a lot of words about our favourite national topic, the weather. There's a sound record of average rainfall year on year, reports of icy winters, the joys of unexpected warm sunshine in February, dry but disappointing summers and hosepipe bans. Sound familiar?

In September '99 Joan expresses worry over the future of the coffee mornings as there was no one to take over the reins from Sylvia Evans.

In the next issue it is happily announced that Christine Bates is to save the day. Seven years on, she's still holding the fort. Well done, Chris.

There's a similar story about Neighbourhood Watch. It is reported that Sylvia Wraight had announced her intentions in '97 to resign as coordinator due to ill health. At a public meeting held in the hall, Sylvia had told the 20 people who attended that since the Watch began, crime incidents had fallen dramatically. Brian Robinson then offered his services for a year to 'see how it goes' and as you all know, he's still doing it. How's it going, Brian?

Feast of information

Many characters emerge from the pages of the *News* who are no longer with us and some of you who will no doubt have fond memories of 'I'm Sage Jape' and Gillian Cressy, both regular contributors who wrote lyrical nature notes, as Joan does now. [For more about them see Joan's column, page 7].

Soon you will all be able to browse through the old issues of *Hilltop News* and, for some, enjoy these classic columns all over again, as webmaster Roger Cheeseworth is planning to put them all on the Hilltop website.

Happy reading and thank you, Joan, for being the hunter-gatherer and providing us with this feast of news, information, observation and drama. Here's to the next ten years!



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