

Working for

C.P.R.E.

The Council for the Protection of Rural England

MARGARET ROBSON

LIKE MOST PEOPLE who enjoy the countryside I felt I should do something relatively positive, such as joining one of the environmental organisations whose leaflets fall like autumn leaves out of every magazine one picks up. After some reflection I settled on the Kent Trust for Nature Conservation, paid my annual subscription and in return received twice yearly its excellent magazine. Each issue contained a list of their voluntary activities, all very worthy, but there was one snag. I live in a very small village and everyone who lives in a small village soon realises that they only exist on the backs of willing villagers. Farmers farm fields but generally care little for hedges and less for woods; village churches are delightful but they need constant repair and churchyards need regular mowing, otherwise those left behind can't find those who have gone! And since no one has any money – well, not for that sort of unprofitable thing – everything that has to be done needs the aforesaid willing villagers to get in and do the job – or raise the essential money in order to get others to do it. You will understand, therefore, that the cries for help from the KTNC went by the board.

At this point, I also joined the Council for the Protection of Rural England (C.P.R.E.), paid my annual subscription and in return received twice yearly its excellent magazine. This passivity might have continued had not a planning application for a house on a cramped plot in the village come up. No-one wanted to see this little green remnant go, no-one needed a house, and in any case the area was not an accepted in-fill site. Out of the blue there came a telephone call from CPRE (Wye), saying they were greatly opposed to the swallowing up of small green plots for purely speculative deals and were prepared to object on our behalf! They did and we did – alas, we lost. But I had learned two things: one, CPRE actually fought at ground level and, two, I needed to know something about local planning. Some months later, when they asked if I'd like to share with Jim Davis the task of looking at local planning applications, I accepted. Now I go weekly to the Whitfield office and inspect such plans as I feel need looking into. It is an absorbing occupation and, despite the iron in my soul over one or two horrors that have been permitted, I find the staff and officers generally are very helpful and it's a good feeling indeed when it seems that CPRE's representations have helped to save some small piece of Kent's heritage.

Here, I'm ashamed to say that until the Dover History Society asked me to talk on CPRE, I had not given much thought to its history. So here's a quick summary:

After World War I the scourge of the twenties and thirties first made its appearance, i.e. ribbon development. Towns began to spider out in all directions and the traditional edges of town and country became blurred. The architect and town planner, Patrick

Abercrombie, later Sir Patrick and the creator of the Greater London Plan in 1943, seeing what was happening and recognising its potential for large scale damage to our green and pleasant land, was able, in 1927, to form a small committee which called itself the Council for the Preservation of Rural England. Its first task was to urge the government of the day to consider creating national parks and equally to consider extending the protection afforded to cities by planning controls to the countryside, which had none. It saw the need to map out country ways and initiated a country code so that townspeople could enjoy the countryside yet know how to respect it. From then on the Council forged ahead, protesting at over-abstraction of water from Ullswater and plans to plant forests over traditional fells. The devastation of war-time bombing prompted it to seek a recording of all our historic buildings in order to preserve them from the quick 'pull-down'.

In 1947 the Town and Country Planning Act embodied many of the requirements CPRE had first raised in 1927. In the fifties it warned against the decentralisation of London and objected to the exemption of farm and forestry buildings from planning control. It fought to prevent the use of farmland for house building when so much land awaited reclamation. Since then from motorways to mining, from water to wilderness, from trains to tunnel and from London to Brussels, CPRE brings its expertise to bear, no longer for the *preservation* of our countryside which had dodo-esque connotations, but for its *protection*. That the County of Kent appreciates the work of CPRE is reflected in its membership, which is the largest in the country.

ARE YOU THINKING OF OWNING A LISTED BUILDING? ——— JEAN PHILPOTT

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THERE ARE OVER 2,800 listed buildings within the District of Dover. The prospect of owning and living in a listed residence attracts a certain glamour especially for anyone who is keen to take on and restore an old property. But such a step should be approached with extreme care on the part of the purchaser. At the same time, perhaps those responsible for conferring listed status on buildings should take a longer term view of what steps are, or should be, taken in preserving buildings of historical interest.

Adequate information is available from local authorities on the procedures to be followed for obtaining grants for repairs to the fabric of such properties. However, the full cost of such work must first be paid by the property owner before an approved grant is received.

When obtaining estimates from contractors, it is essential to ascertain that they have experience in listed building requirements since if the work falls short in any way, the dispute will be between the contractor and the house owner with the possibility of the grant being withheld.