

AWARDS FOR PRESERVING LOOK OF TOWN

BY MARY HARRIS

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Stink pipes (Southern Water) and croquet (Tunbridge Wells Croquet Club) were among the winners at the upbeat Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society conservation and shopfront awards 2006.

The event, now in its 27th year, spotlights the "above-average contribution to the conservation and preservation" of Tunbridge Wells by individuals, organisations and businesses.

To mark the town's 400th anniversary, the society created a further award for Contribution to the Community which was scooped by the Royal Tunbridge Wells Croquet Club and Oak Road Community Association.

At the awards held in the Town Hall, the achievements of winners were heartily applauded and chairman John Cunningham spoke about his delight in living in Tunbridge Wells. He told the audience the town still suffered from the "stereotyped image" of 'Disgusted of Tunbridge Wells'. *"I have lived a mere 9-and-a-half years in Tunbridge Wells and I have to say that I am not disgusted of, or with, Tunbridge Wells, but rather delighted with it. I ask myself why I did not discover it earlier."*

He said the society was founded in 1959 when there was a real threat in the post-War boom years that the town could be *"destroyed through indiscriminate redevelopment"*. *"That threat still continues, although in the past 47 years there has been a considerable change in public awareness and thinking, and we are all very much more conscious of our heritage and the need for conservation and preservation, than we were in those far-off days,"* he added.

Mr Cunningham said leading architect Ptolemy Dean's address at last year's awards about the erosion of the town's architectural character had *"caused alarm in some entrenched areas of opinion, but it certainly enlivened the debate and the result over the past 12 months has been that the conservation issue and its related one of the appearance of Tunbridge Wells, has sprung to life."*

Mr Cunningham described the campaign against Grot Spots and said he hoped the number of Section 215 Orders used by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council on derelict sites would *"increase exponentially"*.

Chairman of the Local Government Association, Lord Bruce-Lockhart, then spoke about the future of local government, devolution and the forthcoming White Paper. He described a "greater confidence and legitimacy" of local authorities and believed Kent was in a strong position to maintain its existing county and district structure. He said "local people on the ground" should work together and have greater control of issues like education, planning and economic development. "People like me want absolute devolution now," he added.