

# THE HIGH WYCOMBE SOCIETY

## *newsletter*

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### Whatever Character We Choose

THERE ARE no fewer than 60 Conservation Areas within Wycombe District, marking out such diverse places as Terriers Green, Downley Common, Four Ashes and Hughenden Manor as distinctive and worthy of protection from unsympathetic development. In any conservation area, it is a criminal offence to demolish a building (or part of a building), or to do any work on trees, without the Council's prior consent. But for us, the most significant is the High Wycombe Conservation Area, extending from Frogmoor in the west through the town centre to The Rye, Holywell Mead and Bassetsbury Lane in the east.

It is Government policy that every conservation area must have a "Character Survey" setting out the special character of the area, so that planners know what to encourage and what to refuse,

and can ensure that the quality of the area is, in the official words, "protected and enhanced". High Wycombe's last character survey was completed in 1995. Time moves on and Wycombe District Council have just produced a new draft for consultation. It is a handsome, scholarly and objective piece of work, containing a wealth of architectural and town planning insights, and can be studied in High Wycombe Library or downloaded from the Internet.

Documenting the present, however, is merely one step towards building the High Wycombe of the future. In places, the document is consciously thought-provoking – what should we be doing, for example, about brash, incongruous shop fronts, or excessive, ugly "street furniture"?

For the future, in the words of James Boswell (1740-1795), we may have "in some degree whatever character we choose". But those choices have to be identified and then followed through. That is the job of Planning Authorities, with the urging and encouragement of Societies such as ours.

**Chris Woodman**

2010

**HIGH WYCOMBE  
DRAFT CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL**

**INTRODUCTION**  
Conservation Areas are areas of special architectural or historic interest, which are considered worthy of preservation or enhancement. They are designated under the provisions of Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

High Wycombe was designated as a Conservation Area in 1970 by Buckinghamshire County Council. The conservation area boundaries were extended in 1976, 1992 and 1994 by Wycombe District Council to include the formerly separate conservation areas of Gattton Platt and Frogmoor, parts of Castle Street, Crenodon Street and the railway station, and parts of the Amersham Hill conservation area. Government Guidance states that conservation areas should have an up-to-date appraisal.

Within Conservation Areas there are special controls on some alterations to buildings and their demolition or partial demolition and on works to trees. More details on the specific controls that apply can be found in the Council's guidance note on conservation areas.

Designation of a conservation area does not preclude the possibility of new development, and preservation should not be thought of as a purely negative process or as an impediment to progress. New development, where appropriate, must however be carefully designed to positively enhance the appearance and special character of the area.

The designation of a conservation area imposes specific duties on local authorities to formulate and publish proposals to ensure that the special characteristics of the conservation area are preserved and enhanced. This conservation area appraisal describes the main features of the special architectural and historic interest that justify

High Wycombe Conservation Area Appraisal 1

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...caring about our town: past, present and future

Registered Charity No. 257897

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## Planning This Quarter

THESE THREE months were marked by a great range of work for the Group, with the usual varied collection of planning applications to be gone through with a fine tooth comb, while Wycombe District Council has been trying to make progress with its strategy for the District and the Town at a time when national Planning Strategy has been turned upside down by the new coalition government's pronouncements.

**Membership of the Group** With the new academic year, our design students from Bucks New University are being "rotated". Farewell to Paul Andrews and Patricia Grasham, who have both now collected excellent honours degrees, and welcome to Daniel Martin, Ben Rose and Pamy Tajes who are 2nd-year students and will hopefully be under less pressure than the 3rd years were. Also this quarter we welcomed to the Group Jette Peddie and Stefan Zachary. Both bring distinctive and valuable backgrounds to the Group's work. Jette is the Business Watch Manager with Wycombe Watch, the security scheme run by town centre traders. Stefan runs Zachary Design, consultants in master planning, architecture and design whose retail design experience spans three decades.

**High Wycombe Railway Station** Members will recall that the logjam on the improvement of High Wycombe Railway Station forecourt was broken 12 months ago when Chiltern Railways obtained planning approval for the admirable scheme which includes restoring Brunel's historic "train shed" to its 1840s glory. An issue has however arisen with the proposed Multi-Storey Car Park, which is on railway land and does not need planning consent. During their pre-application presentation in May 2009, which wowed Councillors, they said this would be white; but recently there have been rumours that they have revised their intentions and are proposing it should be galvanised steel. We hope this will be resolved satisfactorily. It would be very unfortunate, to say the least, if Chiltern Railways were to use their permitted development rights to, in effect, trash the railway area, as seen from Totteridge Road.

**"Massing"** In our Summer Newsletter, we commented on the detrimental effect on the street scene when new buildings go up which are out of scale with their surroundings, citing the new Big Yellow warehouse on London Road and the new flats at 179-183 West Wycombe Road. We were disappointed when the council officers issued this reply in the papers for the Planning Forum on 17 June: *"The Big Yellow Storage facility is not considered an example of poor architecture, and until the flats on West Wycombe Road are completed and given the opportunity to become familiar it is too early to judge them. The impact of bulk and massing are assessed as part of the planning process and is a site specific issue on which there will often be differing views."* There seems to be some convincing to do!

**Stadium** Many members will be aware from the local press that WDC wants to build a new stadium for Wycombe Wanderers and London Wasps, believing that with the right financial arrangements it can actually be a money-spinner, just as Eden has proved to be. Be that as it may, their first idea was to put it at Wycombe Air Park which is in the Green Belt and the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and therefore highly questionable in planning terms. This would require a public examination before a Planning Inspector, and the Council has therefore announced it will hold a consultation exercise considering no fewer than 19 sites. We have offered them advice on how the consultation document should be laid out to enable the public to respond usefully, and the consultation will now start on 17 September, with an exhibition in High Wycombe Library on 25 September.

**CompAir Link Road** When the CompAir site is developed, it will require a spine road along the centre to give access. This will be a "green avenue" which will link with a similar road though the De La Rue site with the aim (according to WDC's planning guidance) of "bringing Hughenden Park into the town". Also, a "linear park" is planned along the Hughenden Stream. This is all excellent, but Bucks County Council want to regard the spine road as a "Link Road", and where it crosses Hughenden Avenue, they have proposed putting a full set of traffic lights. Your editor spoke at the meeting of the Planning Committee saying we did not want encouragement for the "green avenue" to become a rat run up Coates Lane to Downley, nor did we want all those traffic lights, and we received strong support from Councillors. But BCC, as we all know, really love traffic lights, particularly if the cost can be extracted from adjoining developers, and the outcome is not a foregone conclusion.

**Delivery and Site Allocations Document** The Society submitted five pages of comments on the latest version of this detailed planning document, supporting the proposals to dismantle the Abbey Way flyover and re-route the A40, but reiterating our opposition to the idea of putting a large office block in front of the Swan Theatre. We also added a paper conceived by Stefan Zachary calling for a clearer "Masterplan" for the town centre with stated strategies for different zones. We were gratified

that this led to an invitation to a meeting with WDC's Spatial Strategy Manager and we believe our point has been accepted. The Group has also been studying a very competent report for the Council by Peter Brett Associates which has gone into the details of how the River Wye might be de-culverted through the town centre – an aim of the Society for several decades. We were pleased to note that the report gave no support to the assertions we have heard that, for hydrological reasons, the river would be “too far down” to be an environmental asset to the town. On the contrary, it was clear that it could, with the right decisions on alignment and profile, look very good! We hope the Council will press on towards this objective, and will not allow itself to be put off by pessimists and naysayers!

**Planning Enforcement** An interesting planning enforcement case has arisen on Plomer Hill, Downley, at the end of White Road, where a homeowner has sought to incorporate land of uncertain ownership (most probably the County Council's, we understand) into his garden. The citizens of Downley have been getting very indignant about it, and the Planning Group Chairman (Roger Lawson) has been adding his weight to encourage effective enforcement action. Another tiresome case has arisen in West Wycombe Road where a hedge has been removed without permission and the property is now being used to display cars for sale, with a detrimental effect on road safety.

**Sainsbury's Old Car Park** (This refers to the former surface car park near the railway arches.) We have objected to the poor design proposed for a new Premier Inn proposal on this site. The Council's long-term plan is that the new road past this site will become part of a one-way system leading to Hughenden Road, allowing Arch Way to be lowered and reduced to a single carriageway which can be crossed easily by pedestrians. The Group believes it is important that the new road has good-quality architecture so that it can be a worthy extension to the town centre via Frogmoor.

**Bartletts** The chimney that once adorned the old William Bartlett factory in Grafton Street is long-gone and we were recently encouraged to receive an approach from the agents for Catalyst Housing with a revised proposal for 107 dwellings including 37 3-bedroom houses. Perhaps the pendulum is starting to swing away from all 1 and 2-bedroom flats.

*Chris Woodman*

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## Showing off the Town

On 26 August, we were hosts to 37 University of the 3rd Agers from Marlow. First, they were kindly introduced to the historic mayoral regalia by the Mayor, Cllr Jane White, and the Town

Clerk, Mr Bill Reid, and then the Leader of the Council, Cllr Lesley Clarke, dropped in to welcome the visitors. Three of our members then took them on our historical tour of the town. This resulted in a generous donation which will go partly to Society funds and partly to the Mayor's Appeal. Thank you, Mr Reid, Cllr White and Cllr Clarke. And thank you to our guides, John Gore, Jackie Kay and Mary Woodman; and to the keen refreshment team led by Eileen Walters. And finally, thanks also to J Sainsbury plc, who kindly donated some of the refreshments.

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## Second-hand book-keeper wanted

No, the book-keeper doesn't need to be second-hand, but the books are. We desperately need someone who will look after our money-earning, but heavy, second-hand books over the winter and between Pann Mill Open Days. Listen to Ann Simone, our talented poet!

*Could it be YOU that's very strong  
And has a nice big car?  
Who has some space to store things  
And doesn't live too far?  
Who'd be a willing helper  
Unloading without pain,  
Who'd come and collect things  
And take them home again?  
Who'd be around three times a year  
For Pann Mill Open Days?  
If so, please tell me you can help,  
And I'll be just amazed!*

If you have some space and a car, then phone Ann on 01494 448773 as soon as possible. Actually, for 2011 we need helpers for many more humdrum tasks too, but that can wait until the Winter issue!

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## Wrong Partnership

Partnerships are all the vogue these days – even David Cameron's Big Society is a kind of partnership. We could go on at length, but will spare you the detail! Suffice it to say, Jette Peddie (*see opposite*) has pointed out that we referred to the wrong partnership in our leading article on the town's Purple Flag application on the cover of our Summer *Newsletter*.

The Purple Flag application is the work, not of the Town Centre Partnership (though that might have sounded logical), but of Wycombe Watch and the Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce on behalf of the *Wycombe Strategic Partnership*. And see also p.4 for Purple Flag progress.



## Betty Barrett, in remembrance

Betty Barratt MBE died on the 13th June 2010, aged 80 years, following a debilitating illness which had placed her in a local nursing home. Some members visited her there from time to time, to let her know that she was not forgotten. She had joined the Society in 1971.

After being briefly a member of the old Borough Council, Betty was a District Councillor for Marsh and Micklefield Ward from 1973 until her retirement. She became Town Mayor for a year in 1984 when her blonde good looks were complemented by the fine red robe at her "weighing in" ceremony. Later, she was Chairman of Wycombe District Council in 1996/97, marking a high point in her service as a District Councillor. In 1998, she was awarded the MBE for her civic service and her charitable work. On 8th May 2000, the Council made her an Honorary Alderman, on the same day as Kathleen Peatey (happily still with us), and the late Bob Barber.

In her service to the town, when she was not burdened by high office, Betty devoted herself to such matters as housing and youth employment, and worked with groups for disabled and elderly people. She was a steadfast supporter of High Wycombe Society events, particularly Quarterly Meetings, when she never failed to show pleasure at meeting fellow members. We shall continue to miss this lovely lady of such pleasant countenance and sociable nature, who served this town and its citizens over a long period.

**Roger Lawson**

*Betty's life was celebrated at a beautiful civic funeral at All Saints Church on 3 July. For me, the high point came right at the end, as the procession left the church, when Betty had instructed that the Red Flag be played. It was, on the organ, and rather jauntily! As another former Labour Councillor remarked, "She had the last laugh."—Ed.*

## Hail, Masterful Hon. Sec.

Well, would you Adam an' Eve it? Our Hon. Sec. is now Master Frances Presland. Yes, really: after a traumatic several years, when she has not only been holding down a demanding full-time job and the Hon. Secretaryship of our Society, she has also been studying hard for a Master of Science degree

from the University of Salford, and has triumphed.

Your editor asked what she was now a master of, and she told us the title of her thesis. It is (deep breath): *"A Comparison of Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) Principles to an ISO-Based Quality Management System used in the Manufacture of Prepared Microbiological Culture Media"*.

Wow! But anyway, our hearty congratulations, Frances. And next time all you Society members buy some jam at a Pann Mill Open Day, just remember the level of scientific expertise and erudition that has gone into it!

## En Avant, Purple Flag!

Jette Peddie has advised us that the town's application for a purple flag – the new *"gold standard (oh, dear, all these colours!) that recognises great entertainment and hospitality areas at night"* – is successfully through to the next round, which is the actual assessment and will take place when inspectors visit on 25 September. On your best behaviour, everyone!

## Mr Keith Burrows' Magnum Opus

*(For the ever-increasing proportion of you who have never had the joy of learning Latin, that means "Big work!"—Ed.)*

In February, our member Mike Dewey, working in his office at the Bucks Free Press, took delivery of a remarkable package of papers from Mr Keith Burrows of Milton Keynes. What he found on inspection was a true labour of love, entitled *"High Wycombe in the Best of Times – The 1950s and 1960s"*. It is difficult to sum up such a work, but the majority of it is a compilation of reminiscences and social comments on the period, together with a substantial volume of statistics, culled from various sources. It is, however, supplemented by a rather personal compilation of photographs taken at the time, of areas and places in High Wycombe, from various sources (including the SWOP collection, for example) which Mr Burrows describes as a "Photographic Tour". Mike Dewey judged that it was not going to be possible to find room for something of that size and level of detail in the BFP, and passed it on to us. We received it both in hard copy form – a fat A4 envelope – and also on no fewer than 5 CDs and DVDs, about one gigabyte of data in all.

If anybody would like to borrow this work, either as hard copy or as CD/DVDs, please let the Editor know. Alternatively, if you go to the Local Studies section of High Wycombe Library, they have a copy there in a neat folder which you could ask to browse through.

## The Price of Progress – in 1902

TUNNELLING HAS always been dangerous, from the earliest days. The 1.8-mile-long Box Tunnel in Wiltshire, built by Brunel in 1841 as part of the Great Western Railway, was the longest tunnel in the world in its time and some 100 men died during its construction. 58 years later, in 1899, the Great Central Railway's London Extension became the last main line to be completed in Great Britain (until the advent of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link), but in the same year the Great Western and Great Central Joint Railway was formed to build an "Alternative Route" to Marylebone through High Wycombe which would allow the GCR to be independent of the Metropolitan Railway tracks into Marylebone. This line eventually opened in 1906.

Although the route chosen followed the natural valley from Princes Risborough, the Chiltern Hills had to be surmounted between High Wycombe and Beaconsfield, and this entailed a new tunnel 350 yards long beneath White House Farm north of Loudwater. On Friday 5th September 1902 the initial tunnel was completed and work commenced on widening it to the size needed for two standard gauge railway tracks. There were to be day and night shifts and, that night, men began working in the centre of the tunnel.

At 1.30am on Saturday 6th September it collapsed and six men were buried and died. Three men survived, though injured: John Waters ("Irish Jack") who suffered a dislocated shoulder, and brothers Bertrand and Charles Smith. During the day, the bodies of five of the dead were recovered and the last one, William Palmer, was finally brought out on the Sunday evening.

The names of the dead and their ages were:

- Harry Morton (23, the only local man),
- George Smith (41, from Romford),
- John Read (59 – little or nothing is known about him),
- Arthur Palmer (19, from Luckington, Wiltshire),
- Walter Knight (possibly from Weybridge),
- William Palmer (20, uncle of Arthur but almost the same age and from the same place).

WHO MET WITH THEIR DEATHS IN  
WHITE HOUSE TUNNEL  
SEPTEMBER 6 : 1902  
THIS MONUMENT WAS ERECTED BY  
PUBLIC SUBSCRIPTION



The inquest opened on the Monday morning at 11.00am at the Mother Redcap public house where the bodies had been taken. The jury were local men from Wooburn. The burials took place in High Wycombe Cemetery on 9th and 11th September. The Palmer family travelled from Wiltshire to attend the funeral, which was paid for by Messrs Pauling & Co., the tunnel contractors, who had sublet the job to Mr Aaron Arnold, and they also gave their workers a half day so they could attend the event. The *South Bucks Herald* for 12th September records, "Along the route of the funeral a collection was made for the purpose of defraying the cost of erecting a tombstone in memory of the men." Huge crowds gathered along the route and in the cemetery.

The memorial is a beautiful one. At its centre is a broken column, the traditional symbol of a life cut short, on a hexagonal plinth bearing the names of the six dead men. There are also two tablets, one recording the date and place of the sad event and the other admonitory to all who survive.

During 2010 Wycombe District Council, assisted by Creative Memorials, carried out a beautiful restoration job on the monument and on 7th September there was to be a brief ceremony to which some of the descendants had been invited. It is well worth a visit.

HOW SUDDEN AND HOW AWFUL  
WAS THE STROKE BY WHICH THE  
SLENDER THREAD OF LIFE WAS BROKE  
READER REFLECT WHAT HAPPENED  
UNTO US FOR AUGHT THOU KNOWST  
IT HAPPEN UNTO THEE.

*We are most grateful to Sally Scagell for providing much of the information for this article, and to Richard Ogden of Wycombe District Council.*

## Will it come tumbling down after 500 years?

WELL, WE hope not! Our Parish Church celebrated its 900th anniversary in 1987. The tower is actually rather younger – the original tower was in the centre of the building, so the existing tower at the West End of the church was built as recently as 1522! Around 1755 the four pinnacles on the top were added by Henry Keene who was also the architect responsible for our splendid Guildhall. However, that is not the point. In recent years the tower has been showing some substantial cracks inside, and they need to be fixed. In July, your Editor and his wife were lucky enough to be invited to join a visit to the tower after a Sunday morning service and see the problem at first hand – a privilege for which we were very grateful.

To sum up, the root cause is death-watch beetle, but the problem has been exacerbated by the swinging of the huge bells. The number of bells has grown over the centuries. In 1275 there were just three. Now, All Saints has no fewer than 13. There is the usual octave of eight, of which the lowest is traditionally known as the “tenor”, and above those in pitch are a further four (the top one being the “treble”), allowing a full peal of 12. The thirteenth bell (a “sharp second”) enables the ringing of a properly-tuned top octave of eight bells. The last time a completely new ring of eight bells was installed was in 1711.



Cracks in wall...



...and in spiral staircase.

Several of these have been recast in later years. Most recently, the “sharp second” was installed in 1963, having been cast to commemorate the visit of HM The Queen to High Wycombe on 6 April 1962. The oak beam which has been host to death-watch beetle is one of four forming a ring, set in the outer walls of the tower below the bell frame. The failure causes the tower to twist as the bells are rung and there are seven active cracks which may be seen in the inner walls and there are also substantial cracks inside the spiral staircase. Since 2008, the heaviest four bells have not been used.

The chosen solution is to replace the oak beams with a reinforced concrete ring beam. The bells and bell frame will first need to be removed and the bell frame will be replaced. The church authorities have also decided to replace all the bells with a “completely new and slightly lighter ring”.

Needless to say, this does not come cheap! Unlike the restoration of our town’s other Grade I listed building, the Guildhall, in 2000, this must be done with church funds and the



Oak beam damaged by death watch beetle.

estimated cost is £250,000. One-third of the total has been pledged by the current bellringers. On the church’s website you can find how you can help by, for example, donating a bell (£5,900 for the

smallest, £27,600 for the tenor) and having your loved one’s name engraved on it (£3 per letter). Or you can even buy a clapper from £200!

It was fascinating to see the evidence of the problem with our own eyes and to have the details explained to us. We were engrossed by various plaques in the bellringers’ chamber with



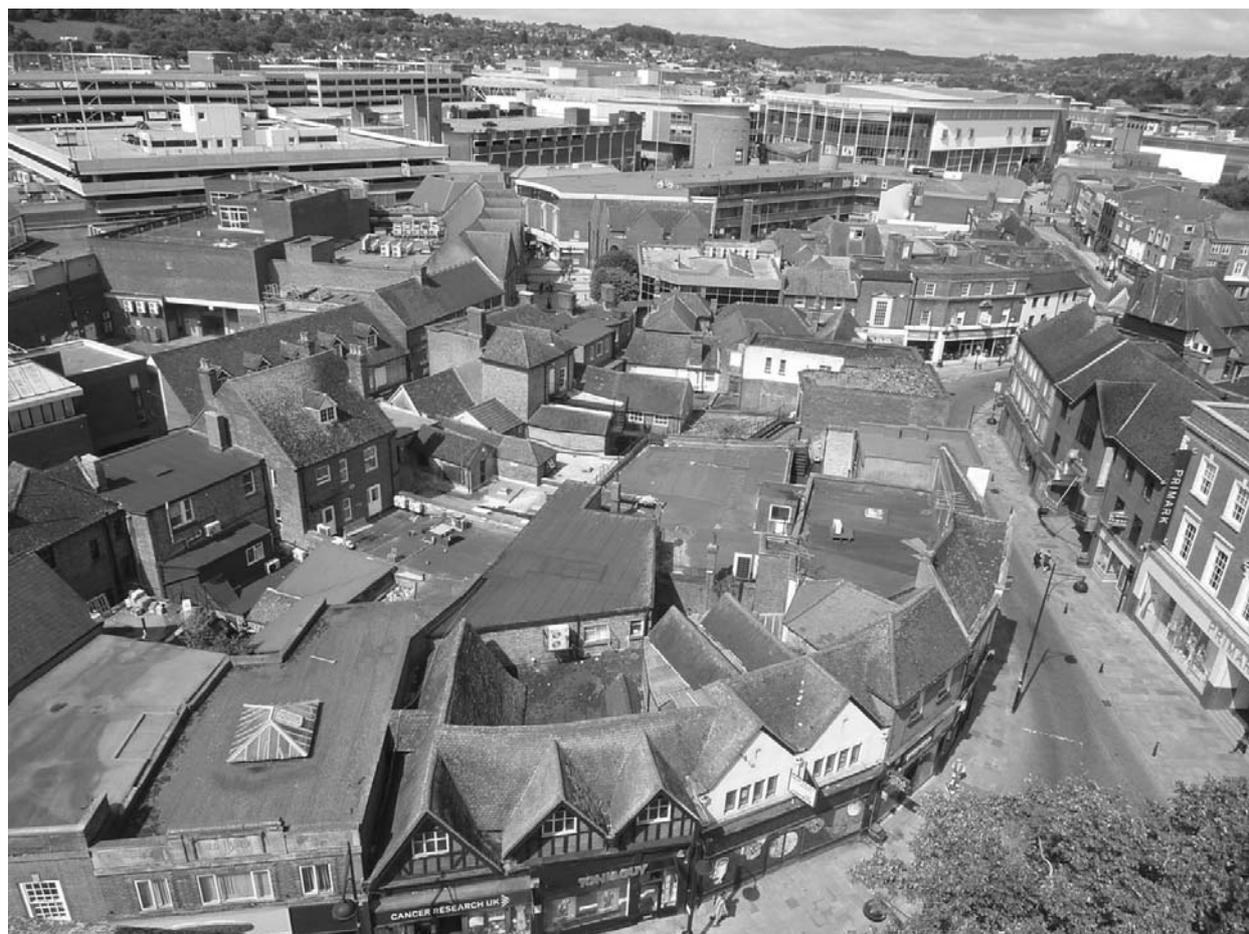
The Gillett & Johnston clock drives a vertical shaft which is connected by gears to the four clock faces.

details of the peals of Grandsire Caters rung in Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee Year, 1897 (5,003 changes) and to celebrate a restoration of the bells in 1910 (5,079 changes – why the difference, we wondered?).

Also, however, we had the opportunity to step out on to the roof of the tower – less scary than we had feared, and the views of the town centre are unique and superb.



The bell frame, to be replaced.



*The historic heart of High Wycombe from the church tower. In the foreground are Queen Square and Church Street, and on the left can be seen the backs of the buildings in White Hart Street.*

## “A Curious Object” – Where Is It Now?

*Readers of the Newsletter will recall that member Jackie Kay is leading a project to research the people – local dignitaries and national personalities – named in the 1911 stained-glass windows in the Town Hall’s Oak Room.*

In 1878, Wycombe antiquarian John Parker published a book entitled *“The Early History and Antiquities of Wycombe”*. In it there is a rather curious picture of the “Wycombe Corporation Arms” in the form of a sculpture said to be “in possession of the author”. It takes the form of a rather round person, holding the badge of the Wycombe Swan, with crown and chain. It may or may not have been a corbel of the old timber guildhall, mentioned in the narrative. If so, at the time John Parker was writing the book there were two such known to be in existence, one in the council chamber and the other in his possession. ***Does anybody know what became of them?***

John Parker is one of the 18 people honoured in the central “Progress Window” in the Oak Room, so it would be particularly appropriate if one could be located in time for the centenary, if indeed, either has survived. If anyone has any information that might lead to a

rediscovery, please contact Jackie Kay or myself.

**Kathleen Peatey**

*OakRoomProject@highwycombesociety.org.uk* or  
Tel: 01494 534876.



*“From an Ancient Sculpture in possession of the Author”*



*In the mid-20th century Murrays was the iconic Wycombe department store: Mike Dewey traces its history.*

REGINALD RIVETT, the founder of Murrays, was born in 1889 at Church Farm in Beeston, Norfolk, where his father was a farmer and cattle dealer. After attending a local boarding school, he gained employment as a travelling salesman in textiles. This job first brought him to High Wycombe in 1910. In 1912, he married Marion Hetherington, and the couple had 5 children: Christine (born in 1913), James (1915), Murray (1919), Elizabeth (1926) and Digby (1927).

During his visits to Wycombe, Reginald became so enchanted by what was then a charming little market town that he and his family moved here in the early 1920s. He saw the business potential in Wycombe, with its expanding furniture industry, and in 1923 decided to buy the drapery section of Drings' shop at 6 Church Square. He named this "The Beehive Drapery" (Fig.1). The business expanded, and in the early 1930s he opened more shops, one at the western end of the High Street, another on the east side of Church Square, and specialist shops in White Hart St. selling fashions, knitting wool and gloves and hosiery.

In 1935, Reginald acquired the shop at No. 27 White Hart St., with an area of 3,000 sq ft, selling household goods. WWII put a temporary end to the further expansion of the business, and brought heartache to the family when their eldest son James was captured by the enemy and held as a prisoner-of-war. The end of the war saw the safe repatriation of James, who returned to work in the family business.

It was in 1948 that Reginald took the momentous decision to sell all his shops except one, and concentrate on developing a department store in High Wycombe, based on No. 27 White Hart St. He named the store Murrays, after his second son. The concept of a department store was new to Wycombe at that time (Marks & Spencer did not open until 1958). Murrays was known as a 'walk-round' store (Fig.2) and became an instant success. In 1951, the



*Fig.1. Reginald Rivett's first enterprise in Wycombe was to rename Drings.*



*Fig.2. Murrays was the walk-round store.*



*Fig.3. After Murrays took over the Methodist Church and made it part of their store, a connecting bridge was built.*

old Methodist church in White Hart St. was acquired to allow Murrays to expand. Although adjacent to No 27, it was actually separated from the church by a 12-ft-wide alleyway (Fig.3). So when the interior of the church was gutted and converted to a store format, a bridge was built over the alleyway to connect the two buildings. The planners at that time specified that the fabric of the church must be preserved, so a modern cladding had to be given to the building.

In 1953 Reginald relinquished most of his responsibilities in the business, with the appointment of his son James, known to everyone as Jim, as Managing Director. Jim set about achieving his vision of building a department store in the centre of High Wycombe with great energy and determination. In 1955 the business purchased the old National School building, adjacent and to the west of the former Methodist Church. A joint venture was entered into with the well-known local company Frank Adams Sports and the Trustees Savings Bank to develop the site. The school building was demolished, and a further extension to Murrays built, adding another 28,000 sq ft of selling space (Fig.4). Having seen this major development successfully completed, Reginald decided to retire to Brisley Hall, East Dereham in his native Norfolk, but remained as Chairman of Murrays.

At that time Murrays was the major department store in Buckinghamshire, with a staff of nearly 300. The 'wave canopy' above the front entrance to the store, and the

clock which moved up-and-down with the lift, became Wycombe icons. The Frank Adams sports shop was also purchased at this time, increasing the selling space to 49,000 sq ft.

Unfortunately Reginald did not enjoy his retirement for long: he died at Brisley Hall on September 6 1963, and his wife Marion took over the Chairmanship of Murrays. In his obituary the Bucks Free Press remembered him as 'genial in character, he was a man of great drive and foresight, and an early pioneer of modern stores'.

With the advent of the Octagon development in Wycombe town centre in the mid-1960s, Murrays agreed to take 24,000 sq ft behind their existing store. Unfortunately the major disruption caused by the re-development of the town centre, which included the inner relief flyover road, resulted in several difficult trading years for Murrays in the late 1960s, before the Octagon was opened in October 1970. Jim Rivett, now Chairman as well as Managing Director, decided that the original store in White Hart St should be re-developed, using contemporary styling. The 'concession shops' and 'street of shops' concepts were developed in the new store (Fig.5), an example being the Childrenswear department.

In 1973, Jim's son Richard was appointed Managing Director of Murrays. The company was now a diversified business, with the making up of curtains and fitting of floor covering for homes and businesses taking place in factories in West End St. A major fire occurred on Nov 29 1975 at the West End St factory, which was shared with furniture manufacturer D. Ridgley & Sons (Frames) Ltd. The building was completely gutted, and Murrays lost stock worth over £20,000, but production was immediately transferred to the Cressex factory.

In the late 70s/early 80s Murrays experienced difficult trading conditions, and made substantial losses. In 1983, half of the store on the White Hart St frontage was sold, with Principles, Salisbury's and Taylor & McKenna taking space. This failed to stop the decline of the business, and on the 30th March 1985 the store closed after the property was sold to the investment company Scottish Provident Institution. Wye Contract Furnishing Ltd, formerly Murrays Manufacturing, was sold in 1986; many of the highly skilled staff who were trained from school still work for the company.

There are many people in and around High Wycombe who worked for Murrays. A group of them are seen relaxing on the rooftop terrace (Fig.6), and Mike Dewey would be pleased to hear from them and their personal recollections of the business.

One person who has recounted her memories is Mrs Betty Dean. Betty remembers joining the Rivett's woolshop on the northern side of White Hart St in about 1947, shortly before it was sold. After a year or two she left, and trained as a GPO telephonist. In 1955/56 Betty was approached by Joan Smith, known as 'Miss Canneaux', who was for many years head of personnel, to join the store as telephonist/receptionist. Betty worked for Murrays until the birth of her first child in 1958, and then again on a part-time basis after her children went to school. She remembers that she was chosen to be a mannequin at the first Murrays fashion show in the town hall in 1958, and received training from professional models from London. She then found out she was pregnant, and thought that she would not be able to participate, but was told that she could model maternity clothes!



Fig.4. 28,000 sq.ft. of selling space were added in 1955.



Fig.5. After the Octagon opened in 1970, Murrays was redeveloped with the "concession shops" and "streets of shops" concepts.



Fig.6. Do you know who any of these young ladies are? Mike Dewey would like to hear from you if you do, on 01628 525207!

she would not be able to participate, but was told that she could model maternity clothes!

**Mike Dewey**

## Taplow Court

TAPLOW COURT near Maidenhead is now the home of the SGI-UK, a lay Buddhist Society. The house and its gardens were the destination of our shared car outing on 6 June.

The house is situated above the River Thames with a commanding view of the valley. The site also has a large pond which, although on a hilltop, never drains. It is not surprising that the site has been inhabited from early times. Excavations have found Bronze Age tools and pottery and a large Iron Age hill fort. Today visitors can climb the 7th century Anglo-Saxon burial mound which was excavated in 1883, uncovering rich grave goods which told of the tomb of a person of power. Nearby there was once a 13th century church, the remains of which were cleared away to make way for extensions to the house in the 19th century.

The manor of Taplow is mentioned in records of the 11th century. The site of the current building dates from the 1630s. The Orkney family acquired Taplow and neighbouring Cliveden at about the same time around 1700.

In 1831 Thomas John Hamilton inherited the title from his grandmother and set about remodelling the house. He created the Norman revival hall which is such a striking feature at the centre of the building. In 1851 the house was sold to Charles Pascoe Grenfell, who in turn asked his architect William Burn to redesign the house in the Victorian-Jacobean style. The family coat of arms, three organ stops and the motto *Loyal Devoir* (faithful to duty), appear above the main entrance.

In 1867, when he was 11 years old, William Henry Grenfell inherited the estate from his grandfather, John Granville Grenfell. After serving for some years as an MP, initially Liberal and then Conservative, he was raised to the peerage in 1905 as Baron Desborough of Taplow. He excelled at sport and was President of the first Olympic Games to take place in England, at the White City in 1908. Together with his brilliant wife Ettie, he hosted meetings of the elite group known as 'The Souls'.

A memorial to their two sons, Julian and Billy, killed in World War I, stands on the South Terrace. Their third son Ivo died in 1926.

After Ettie's death, in 1946 Taplow Court was leased to British Telecommunications Research. Later the house and present estate were acquired by Plessey Electronics in 1963.

Soka Gakkai International UK came in 1988 and have restored the house to its Victorian grandeur. The rooms and furnishings convey so well the rich social and intellectual circle led by Ettie. A

poignant reminder of her sons is a half-finished picture ("cartoon") by Sir William Rothenstein, showing an imagined scene of Julian, Billy and their contemporaries receiving their degrees which they would never complete.

In an upper room in the house there was a video presentation of the history of SGI which is based on the philosophies of the 13th century Japanese monk, Nichiren Daishonin. The organisation is dedicated to establishing a peaceful world through religious, educational and cultural activities. Despite the number of visitors there is no bustle, and the calm atmosphere makes for an enjoyable and relaxing visit.

It is possible to tour the house with a guide but the information sheets available together with the notices in each room are ample to enable visitors to enjoy a self-guided tour. In addition to the house, the gardens offer both wild and formal walks. Picnics are welcome, with

cream teas also for sale in a building which was once Lord Desborough's indoor tennis court.

In 2010 Taplow Court opened on four days and entry is free. Booking is not required for small groups.

**Raymond A Mow**



*The entrance of Taplow Court is watched over by a statue of George III in Coadestone.*



*The "Norman Revival" central hall.*

## Quarterly Meeting

# Weathermen in Wycombe

At our Quarterly Meeting on 2 July 2010, the High Wycombe Society played host to guest speaker Malcolm Walker, Chairman of the Royal Meteorological Society's Special Interest Group for the History of Meteorology and Physical Oceanography. He travelled up from Devon with his wife Diane to give his talk entitled "*Pioneers of Meteorology in Buckinghamshire*", and therein to tell us all about a small slice of High Wycombe's history that is preserved in the National Meteorological Archive in Exeter.

Malcolm is very familiar with these archives, as he is engaged in writing the official history of the Royal Meteorological Society, due out next year. Of special interest to our Society is that they include the weather diaries of a former resident and mayor of our town by the name of James George Tatem, and some bundles of his correspondence with fellow meteorologists. Over the past year, Malcolm and Diane have both provided assistance with research on the Oak Room Windows Centenary Project, as James George Tatem is one of the 18 people honoured in the Progress Window. Present in the audience on 2 July was Richard Scott, a direct descendant of James George Tatem, who was traced through our heritage project activity, and had travelled down from his home in Knaresborough, North Yorkshire, eager to learn more about his ancestor's activities. He would not be disappointed.

Malcolm began with a brief consideration of Elector Palatine Karl Theodor of Bavaria's contribution to the subject in the eighteenth century in founding the "Societas Meteorologica Palatina" in Mannheim, the first ever well-organised but short-lived meteorological society in the world. He then turned his attention straight to events in England in 1823. An editorial in *The Monthly Magazine* prompted James George Tatem to write a letter in which he sought to "call the attention of the meteorologists in the metropolis and its vicinity to the propriety of forming a [Meteorological] Society" which he thought would provide "amusement" to men of science and be of "benefit" to valetudinarians. From its uncertain foundations in a meeting at the London Coffee House later that year, Malcolm outlined the history of "The Meteorological Society of London" with Dr George Birkbeck as its President. He highlighted in particular the role James George Tatem had played together with William Henry White in reviving the society when it had "sunk into a state of rest" ... "from a want of zeal" in 1836.

James George Tatem was not the only High Wycombe resident practising and supporting

Meteorology at that time. Samuel Luck Kent was on the Society's council in 1838 and 1839, and The Rev. J. C. Williams subscribed to the Society. Lord Carrington also became Vice-President for a time. What is unusual about Tatem's observations is that they span a period of nearly 40 years and include much statistical analysis in the form of visual "diagrams", often comparing results over many years. In Malcolm's estimation they show a man "beginning to think like a more modern meteorologist". Less valued today are Tatem's ventures into astrology.

Another Buckinghamshire resident to become involved was Dr. John Lee who lived at Hartwell House. With help from Admiral W. H. Smyth, he set up a well-equipped observatory at Hartwell. In 1839 Dr Lee was listed as the Treasurer of the Meteorological Society of London. It was at Hartwell House, however, on 3rd April 1850 that the British Meteorological Society was formally founded. James Glaisher, the only full-time government-appointed meteorologist became its Hon. Secretary. James George Tatem joined the British Meteorological Society later in the year and remained a member until his death.

James George Tatem's son, also James George Tatem, donated his father's meteorological manuscripts to the British Meteorological Society in 1856, believing he was placing them in safe custody for future generations of meteorologists, but as Malcolm revealed at the end of his talk, we are very fortunate that they have survived!

A lively question and answer session ensued, at the end of which our treasurer, Paul Meek, gave a formal Vote of Thanks. In doing so he drew on his own past experience as a practising meteorologist in the Navy, when sailors received met. data by telegraph and used pen and ink to interpret it. We hope that Malcolm, Diane and Richard will all return to High Wycombe in 2011, when it is anticipated that more will be revealed about the lives of the weathermen of Wycombe.

**Jackie Kay**



From left to right: Richard Scott, Malcolm and Diane Walker and Jackie Kay.

## Notices

### New Members

We warmly welcome the following new members:

Transition Town High Wycombe.

Mrs S P and Mr D Bullock of Cressex Rd., HW.

Mr S Churchill of Coates Lane, HW.

Mr C Hayfield of Beaconsfield.

Miss A Hanks of Holtspur.

...not to mention our new youngest member, Miss Imogen Payne. Congratulations Hilary and Garry!



### Obituaries

We regret to announce the deaths of:

Hon. Alderman Mrs. Betty Barrett (*see p.4*)

Mr David Clark

Mrs Marjory Davis

Mr Ronnie Hooker CBE

Mr Tony Jeeves

We extend our condolences to their families and friends.

### Visit to the Prince's place!

The Highgrove visit went off Oh!-so-smoothly on 10 August, thanks to Eileen Walters' splendid organisation. Alas, the Prince of Wales doesn't allow visitors like us to bring cameras or mobile phones on to his estate, so we can provide you with no evidence that we were really there, and even Eileen couldn't organise the weather. It was damp, damp, damp! But the resourcefulness of the owner in obtaining giant bric-a-brac to display in the many little gardens that make up Highgrove's grounds has to be admired. A good time was had by all. Thank you, YRH!

And a word for the few who didn't succeed in our lottery for places. It is now possible to apply *individually* to visit and the organisers there will fit you into one of their groups. (Contact Mary Woodman on 01494 528106 for details.)

### Preparing for Chiltern Mainline

For many years, High Wycombe has enjoyed one of the best commuting routes in the South-East. Soon the fastest trains to London will do it in 23 minutes! Now Chiltern Railways' charismatic Chairman has set his sights higher – to use the Chiltern line to provide services to Birmingham (and beyond?) that match those by Virgin on the West Coast Main Line in speed and comfort. Come along to Bucks New University on 3 November and learn more.

### FAGAM

The next meeting of the Forum for Affiliated Groups and All Members (FAGAM) is in the Friends' Meeting House on 12 November. At these meetings we have very good exchanges about all sorts of matters of interest to the Society. This is *your* opportunity to raise issues of concern to you or the affiliated group you represent, particularly on matters concerning planning, transport and The Rye. It would be helpful, but not essential, if you could advise the Hon. Sec. in advance of any issues you intend to raise: this will help the Executive members to be better prepared.

### Publicity Officer

Yes, hurrah, we have a new Publicity Officer, Tony Murphy (01494 443552). Thank you very much, Tony, for volunteering to look after all the posters and publicity for our events.

### From the Editor...

Many thanks to all those who have contributed copy for this issue. Material for the Winter 2010/11 issue should reach me at 29 Maybrook Gardens High Wycombe HP13 6PJ (01494 528106) by **20 November**.

*Chris Woodman (Hon Editor)*

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Put these dates in your diary **now!!!**

Wednesday, 3rd November  
7.30pm, Bucks New University

Quarterly Meeting: Preparing for Chiltern Mainline. Speaker: Adrian Shooter, CBE, Chairman, Chiltern Railways (*see above*).

Friday, 12th November  
7.30pm, Friends' Meeting House,  
25 London Road

Forum for Affiliated Groups and All Members (*see above*).

Friday, 21st January  
7.30pm, Guildhall

Quarterly Meeting: Archaeology – all stones and bones?  
Speaker: Dr Jill Evers, Director, Chiltern Archaeology.

Friday, 4th February

Quiz: further details in the Winter Newsletter. Contact Mary Woodman on 01494 528106.