

Don't forget:
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THE HIGH WYCOMBE SOCIETY

newsletter

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Planning – and Responsibilities

Decisions on planning applications are amongst the most tricky responsibilities that District Councils have to discharge. While much work is routine and can be delegated to council officers, others involve a very difficult balance and the end result cannot possibly satisfy everybody. The recent decision to reject an application from Penn School was a horrendously difficult example. To survive, it was argued, the school site must be developed to generate capital to sustain the institution during its first few years of independent operation. Yet it lies in the Green Belt, on a difficult junction, probably with archaeological remains beneath. Passions rose in the Planning Committee: unwise (and easily misquotable) things were said. Nobody wanted to kill the school off, and a doctor's surgery and old folks' accommodation were sorely needed in the village. But approval might set an awkward precedent, particularly with the treasured Gomm Valley nearby.

Three weeks later in the Council, it became clear that the project is not dead and all involved are seeking a way forward. The lessons seem to be, first, that those with difficult applications should receive the best possible, carefully-considered help (and not, for example, be given advice that leads them to amend their application to something worse); second, that strongly-held local views must be properly heeded; and third, that people should remain cool and not wait for the inevitable aftermath in the press before insisting that they can see all sides of the difficult case.

Then there are other cases where our representatives wish to take the right decision, but are apparently stymied by the law. Take retail warehousing on the London Road, for example. The minutes report, "Members, having found no adequate grounds to oppose this application, did with reluctance vote in favour." The County Council had advised, incredibly, that there would be no adverse effect on traffic. They work 20 miles away in Aylesbury, of course. What was done in Wycombe to foresee this problem and ask them to consider the case very carefully, we wonder? And often officers seem to go overboard in setting out the constraints to our District Councillors. Of course, nobody wants to see our Councillors surcharged by an auditor for taking an illegal decision. But how often is that a realistic possibility? A year ago, Councillors stood up robustly to advice that they should permit inappropriate garage-type activity in a residential area at Fennels Road. As far as we know, that decision has not been challenged.

Our Councillors do not lack spirit. But sometimes they need not only detailed, impartial and expert advice (which they generally get), but every possible assistance in constructing the case that will enable them to do what they need and wish to do in the interests of the town.

Chris Woodman



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

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Planning

Local Plan Public Inquiry – Part 2

THE LOCAL PLAN Public Inquiry continues to provide not only entertainment for those with the time to sit through its long deliberations but also valuable insights into the choices to be made for the future of Wycombe District. The latest indications are that the inquiry will run at least until 22 June. The Inspectors have hinted that their report is not likely to be available until mid-2002. Then the District Council will have to decide what to do with their recommendations and eventually we shall have a new Local Plan for the period up to 2011. By that time, the deliberations on a new County Structure Plan up to 2016 will be well underway, and the Local Plan cycle will start all over again!

14 November saw the first formal appearance of the **Grange Action Group** who oppose all development on Grange and Terriers Farms. GAG includes local Parish Councils as well as voluntary organisations, and they are making themselves felt. At that session, they backed up their bid to have Grange and Terriers Farms no longer classified as Safeguarded Land for future development (i.e. not before 2011) by seeking higher density on the Terriers School site and more housing in the Town Centre. This was salutary pressure on the District Council, but David Wainman, leader of GAG, was able to make little impact with the argument that too many shops are standing vacant: WDC were able to show that vacancy rates were below the national average. *(But what will happen when the Western Sector opens is anyone's guess!)*

Later that day there was a preliminary skirmish with the **Gomm Valley Action Group** (Miles Green) who argued that there should be a recognised break between Tylers Green/Penn and High Wycombe. The Inspector was sympathetic but could not see a valid way to mark this on the map.

On 28 November, **Dr Elsa Woodward** of the Society's Transport Group made her pitch for protection of the line of the former High Wycombe to Bourne End Railway for future public transport use. It fell to John Callaghan of the District Council to stage a defence based on briefing from the County Council. He argued (based on consultants' studies that we consider to be seriously flawed) that there was no economic case for such a development at present though the possibility could not be ruled out over 10, 20 or 30 years ahead. With the County he therefore supported protection of the line for transport use (the County already wants to use it for a cycleway) but not specifically for public transport use. The Inspector was sympathetic, considering that our concerns might be covered in a descriptive passage in the Plan.

On 29 November **Mrs Pat Price** represented RATS – "Residents Against Transport Stupidity" – with strongly expressed views against a bus

lane in Desborough Avenue. The next day **Tesco's** continued their guerilla war seeking changes to some of the transport policies in the Plan: they want more car parking space for the new supermarket that they are still negotiating for.

9 January saw the "**Affordable Housing Round Table**". The proposed Plan would require the District Council to negotiate at least 30% of "affordable housing" on all sites for 15 or more dwellings. The discussion became detailed and technical and it was clear that we were watching a veritable "circus" of expert witnesses who meet up at Public Inquiries all round the country! The developers wanted the definition of affordable housing explicitly stretched to include not merely subsidised housing but "low-cost market housing" from which they could make greater profits. The Inspector showed no sympathy with their views.

On 10-11 January, continued on 8 February which also saw the final evidence on **Grange Farm**, the Inquiry took the main evidence on **Terriers Farm**. The owners and developers of Terriers Farm, the developers Beazer and Redrow, wanted to develop their land immediately (for 400 dwellings) and considered its case stronger than Abbey Barn North, while the Grange Action Group opposed even its classification as Safeguarded Land for development not before 2011. Similar arguments had been run in relation to Grange Farm in December (at a session which your reporter missed).

For much of the argument, WDC and GAG were on the same side. The developers argued that Terriers Farm, at least, was well shielded by hedgerows and could be developed without new transport links. Expert landscape evidence indicated that Grange Farm fell into two parts: the western quarter (at the Terriers end) being of high landscape quality, like Terriers Farm, while the Hazlemere end was inferior. Grange Farm and Terriers Farm formed a natural break between Wycombe and Hazlemere and also formed part of a green wildlife corridor (from the Gomm Valley to Hughenden) around the north of the town. At the spillover session on 8 February, the National Trust cross-examined the witnesses very effectively. While they made little headway with arguments

that development of Grange Farm would affect the setting of Hughenden Manor directly, there were indications of the real arguments to come on 22 May. All agreed that the development of Grange Farm is tied up with the building of the Hazlemere diversion of the A404. That road – the line of which is protected in the proposed Plan at the County Council's insistence – would cut a swathe across the eastern side of the Hughenden Valley and will be most strongly opposed by the National Trust and all environmental and residents' groups.

Overall, it seems unlikely that the Inspector will recommend any immediate change in the status of Terriers and Grange Farms. The real value of these sessions was in previewing arguments that may be fought in earnest over the *next* Local Plan in 5 years' time.

On 16 January, District Councillor **Mrs Anthea Hardy** (Lab.) presented her case for a new self-contained 3,000-dwelling settlement straddling the M40 at Booker Airfield (with a Business Park on Booker Airfield itself). Her logic was that Wycombe is strangled by traffic and that the only way to avoid aggravating the problem is by building well away from the town centre. The problem is that her proposals would do terrible damage to the Green Belt and open countryside. Her proposals have no hope of acceptance by the Inspector. A District Council Officer told us afterwards, however, that for the next County Structure Plan, a comparison of rival options close to and away from the town will need to be conducted, but she was confident that such a study would support the current choice of Safeguarded Land.

On 17 January, AXA and William Vere Properties, developers, *opposed* the development of the **Bucks Free Press site** for housing! They argued that it was a sloping site next to the railway (have they never been to High Wycombe, we wondered!) and that other sites should be allocated for housing instead – no doubt offering them greater profits. William Vere even wanted to offer evidence that Chapel Lane Industrial Estate should be redeveloped instead. The District Council said that Vere's had not lodged an objection to Chapel Lane at the right time, and a bemused Inspector heard learned submissions from expensive barristers, one of whom even cited the Human Rights Act in his support.

On 7 February, the Prison Service sought the Inspector's

support for the large-scale development of part of **Finnamore Wood**. In making their case their advocate argued that folks who have already bought, and are living in, former officers' quarters might all decide to sell them to a developer. The Inspector invited him to "join the real world"!

On 14 February, there was more opportunist opposition by developer AXA to the allocation of land for housing. In this case, their target was **Abbey Barn North**, where they were supported by the Bassetsbury Area Protection Group and BBOWT. But what was to emerge was astonishing.

Abbey Barn North is a small site, which the District Council believes is suitable for 100 dwellings, which crosses the stub end of Kingsmead Road and stretches up the hill west of Abbey Barn Lane. It will certainly be damaging to Wycombe's setting and the wildlife witnesses testified to the loss of foraging for badgers and the difficulty of relocating lizards. But further up the hill is the Abbey Barn South site which is Safeguarded Land for future development. Just days before the Inquiry session, the District Council had presented a Supplementary Proof of Evidence showing a possible new road, proposed by consultants in 1997 but not hitherto revealed, to serve Abbey Barn South. This would be an extension of a distributor road for the huge new Wycombe Marsh development. It would cross the stub end of Kingsmead Road *on a flyover* and would join the existing line of Abbey Barn Lane half way up the hill. Council officers have advised us that the putative developer of Abbey Barn South has other ideas for access to their site, but the flyover road is sufficient of a possibility for the District Council to seek to protect its path as it crosses Abbey Barn North. You can find the map, which the Council's witness kindly passed us in computerised form, on our web site, www.highwycombesociety.org.uk.



And, of course, such public occasions are heaven-sent opportunities to local artists to practise their art. Thank you, Lorna!

Planning This Quarter

IN THE PAST three months the Planning Group has had to tackle a wide range of issues, local, regional and national. Here is a selection.

Gas Works site In our Autumn 2000 Newsletter, we referred to the planning application for flats and retail warehousing on the former gas works site, and its deferral for negotiation with the applicant about the provision of active leisure facilities. This, unfortunately, came to nothing: the application for retail warehousing is going forward. Leisure consultants engaged by BG Property Holdings Ltd reported that leisure on the site would not be as profitable as retail; so leisure was out. It is a pity profit comes way ahead of community service these days.

Nurses' Home on Tom Burt's Hill Some of you will remember the furore of ten years ago when the hospital authorities succeeded in obtaining planning permission to extend the nurses' home further up Tom Burt's Hill, a Local Landscape Area, after agreeing a lower roof height with WDC. Wisely, the Council imposed a condition that the flats could only be let to nurses. Last year, however, South Bucks NHS Trust applied to have the condition removed, but later withdrew the application in favour of another asking for key workers such as police or fire officers to be allowed to occupy the flats should nurses not require them. The Council has now granted permission subject to some tightening of the conditions. It seems odd that this nurses' accommodation, which we were told was once needed so urgently, should now be considered partially redundant at a time when the NHS is keen to enrol more nurses and ought to have accommodation available for any new recruits. We trust that there will be no further 'desperately-needed' applications to build on this open space.

Houses in Multiple Occupation It has been clear in recent months that some Councillors on the Planning Applications Panel have felt frustrated at not having sufficient power to control the numbers of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) that have been appearing in parts of the town, many for occupation by students. The Director of Planning, Transport & Development is now trying to remedy this by issuing supplementary planning guidance on HMO requirements for incorporation into the District Local Plan. We have welcomed the guidance, which includes requirements on room size, sound insulation, parking provision and, most importantly, impact on the character of the area.

Draft Revised Regional Planning Guidance for the South East Following a public consultation,

the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) has issued revised planning guidance for the South East, on which County Structure Plans up to 2016, and subsequently District Local Plans, will be based. Revised County housing distribution targets were also included. The revised version is much more acceptable than the original in that it follows more closely the principles of sustainability and urban renaissance, aiming to target development on to brownfield sites in urban areas rather than in the countryside. The housing target for Buckinghamshire up to 2006, namely, an average building rate of 3210 dwellings per year, is more realistic than before as it approximates to the current actual building rate, and we have welcomed this in our response sent to the Government Office for the South East. We also made the point that economic policy should be directed at sharing prosperity across the country rather than concentrating it around London, so that Bucks need only cater for its own indigenous population growth.

Adverts in Telephone Boxes We have given our support to a Civic Trust-led campaign to control advertisements on telephone kiosks, some of which cover whole sides of the box, by writing to the DETR calling for new regulations to be promulgated. These advertisements degrade the quality of the street environment (examples can be seen in White Hart Street outside Laura Ashley's) and block views into and out of the boxes, providing a hiding place for criminals and reducing the effectiveness of CCTV. What is more, the telephone companies are using powers given to them primarily to provide a telephone service, which means they do not have to obtain local Council permission, even in conservation areas where advertising hoardings would not normally be allowed. In our letter, we asked the DETR to change the regulations to give local Councils the necessary control.

We have just heard that, following a Civic Trust-led delegation, the DETR has announced that it will shortly be launching a formal consultation on the issue. We hope this will lead to a clearing up of this particular form of urban vandalism.

John Gore

And now they've gone from the boxes in White Hart Street. The Civic Trust say BT has adopted a voluntary Code of Practice although they argue this does not go far enough. Perhaps BT believe their boxes in White Hart Street are in a Conservation Area, though actually they're just outside.—Ed.

Urban Renaissance White Paper

For years we have talked about the need to revive our inner cities to make them more attractive places to live in, in order to reverse the population drift to the suburbs and beyond, and thus save our countryside from excessive development. While we have talked, our continental neighbours have been taking action. Now, a Government White Paper *Our Towns and Cities: The Future – Delivering an Urban Renaissance* which was published towards the end of last year, promises to put urban regeneration at the heart of planning policy. We hope it succeeds. Recommendations include:

- o Setting up 12 new urban regeneration companies in the largest cities, which could comfortably increase their populations.
- o Plans to establish Centres of Excellence in design and planning.
- o Setting aside £96M for a programme of improvement in the quality of parks, play areas and open spaces in towns and cities.

Several initiatives designed to reduce the amount of empty property are promised, such as VAT concessions and/or tax relief on converting properties and rooms over shops to residential use. Also, property transactions in disadvantaged areas are to be exempt from Stamp Duty. These measures should help to enliven city centres and make property more affordable to the key people needed to keep our cities running.

The White Paper is loosely based on the report

!!! Quiz Time !!!



Calling all children 1 - 15 years old... A £5 W H Smith token is available if you can answer the following question.

"Which famous historical figure may have a relative buried in the Parish Church?"

Send your answers to the Editor (address on back page) by 31 March. The first correct answer out of the bag will win.

Questions set by Pauline Cauvain of our Heritage Group. Last issue's question was "Where and what are the Rupert Gates?" Once again, there were no responses. Really, this would be money for jam for a young person with initiative! The Rupert Gates once stood where the Library Gardens are now and were the entrance to Wycombe Abbey from the High Street. When Lord Carrington passed part of the Abbey Grounds to the Borough Council for the Council Offices and Queen Victoria Road, the gates were re-installed part-way up Marlow Hill, where they stand today.

of the Urban Task Force led by Lord Rogers of Riverside (Richard Rogers the architect). What does he think of it? In general, he welcomes its provisions, but notes with disappointment that his recommendation on harmonising VAT rates on new building (nil) and conversions/repairs (full) has been ignored. He is not alone in thinking that the tax regime ought to be rejigged to encourage brownfield rather than greenfield development.

John Gore

Transport

Building links...

Towards the end of 2000, we were delighted when John Callaghan, a Wycombe District Council Officer with responsibility for transport, suggested that the Society's Transport Group should meet from time to time with representatives of both WDC and BCC for a general round-up on transport matters.

The first such meeting took place on 13 December. Elsa Woodward, Roger Lawson and Chris Woodman attended for the Transport Group and David Leiserach and John Callaghan represented WDC and BCC respectively. In the event, the meeting fell (by design) soon after the regular meeting of the Wycombe Joint Transportation Strategy Panel and added little to what we had learnt at that meeting. But we were hugely impressed by the openness and helpfulness of the two officers and it was agreed that the next meeting would be held in June.

...And Making Corridors Work

The most interesting item at the December meeting of the Joint Transportation Strategy Panel was some preliminary results from the Corridor Study which (we now hear) will be reported in full to a special meeting of the Panel on 29 March.

The early results related to the "East of Town Centre," the Abbey Way Gyratory and the London Road. Various approaches were suggested to enhance the gyratory's capacity, but the front-runner was to make it one way again, to widen the carriageways and add traffic signals all round. If this is adopted in due course, it will not be implemented for several years, although carriageway renewal this summer will be able to take the plans into account. To provide access to the High Street from the new rail/bus interchange at the station, there is a proposal (which Councillors were not convinced about) to allow buses to turn right at the bottom of Crendon Street. And in the London Road it is proposed to introduce several sets of traffic signals (doing away with

(continued on page 9)

The Wycombe Railway

In the Winter issue of the Newsletter, we reported progress with the planned busway which will connect London Road at Spring Gardens with Wycombe's Railway Station. Since then, an unexpected development has taken place. The Broad Gauge Society has succeeded in getting Wycombe's original Railway Station, now used by ATS Tyre, a Grade II Listing. The history of that building is far more interesting than any of us could have imagined, and David Lane of Aylesbury, who has done much research on the subject, has supplied this fascinating résumé.

WYCOMBE'S ORIGINAL connection to the national railway network was via Maidenhead. The railway to Wycombe was first planned in 1846. After a number of false starts the line finally opened on 1st August 1854, with intermediate stations at Maidenhead (Boyne Hill), Cookham, Bourne End, Wooburn Green and Loudwater. The railway was built and owned by the Wycombe Railway Company with its engineer, the famous Isambard Kingdom Brunel. In 1862, the company extended the line from High Wycombe to Thame. In 1863 a branch line from Princes Risborough to Aylesbury was added and finally the railway from Thame to Oxford was completed in 1864 – ten years after reaching Wycombe itself.

From the start, the Wycombe Railway was leased to the Great Western Railway, and in 1867 they finally bought the line from the independent Wycombe Company. The track was laid to Brunel's unique broad gauge of 7 feet ¼ inch, being converted to today's standard 4 feet 8½ inches in 1870.

The Wycombe Railway as originally built was uniform in appearance throughout its length. The larger stations of Wycombe and Thame were provided with trainsheds and attached engine sheds, while the smaller intermediate stations were identical in design, having a

booking office at one end with an open porch or waiting area at the other. Those stations that had adjacent level crossings had an additional crossing keeper house attached to the station. The only differences were in the building construction, the original 1854 section having been built in red brick and flint, while the 1862-1864 sections were built in plain brick, either red or yellow.

With the coming of the Great Western and Great Central Joint Railway from Marylebone at the turn of the century, and the upgrading and doubling of the line between High Wycombe and Princes Risborough, the old Wycombe Railway was truncated into two separate branches, the original line between Maidenhead and Wycombe and the second part between Princes Risborough and Oxford.

With nearly 150 years of history behind it, and large sections of the line having closed, a project to survey and record those parts that still remain was undertaken. The most remarkable discovery was the survival of the original Brunel-designed terminus station at Wycombe. When the original line was extended to Thame in 1862, a new alignment was built to the north of the old station. Through trains therefore had to reverse out of the station to proceed to Oxford. This arrangement lasted



David Lane's splendid watercolour, depicting Wycombe Station, built to Brunel's trainshed design, as it appeared after its opening in 1854, looks even better in colour on our website www.highwycombesociety.org.uk. The picture is reproduced here with the artist's permission.

until at least 1864 when a new station at Wycombe was built on the current site. The old station was converted to a goods shed.

Due to Wycombe being the terminus and most important station on the 1854 route, it was provided with an overall roof to Brunel's famous trainshed design. As originally built, High Wycombe Station had a pitched slate roof with brick and flint walls covering both the single platform and the two lines of rails, with glass porticoes at each end. The trainshed measured some 120 feet by 40 feet, and on the side adjacent to Birdcage Walk stood the main station building. Attached to the side facing the present station was the locomotive shed which was 50 feet long by 20 feet wide. Between 1875 and 1905 a number of extensions were added to the old station, doubling its length and hiding its attractive glassed porticoes and locomotive shed within the extensions, although looking at the roof from the multi-storey car park reveals all.

Out of some 75 to 100 stations once built to Brunel's trainshed design on the Great Western Railway system, only three others have survived, all located in the West Country. But Wycombe Station is the oldest and possesses many unique architectural features not repeated elsewhere. Due to the importance of the building an application was made to list the building in June last year, which was granted in December at Grade Two. In the meantime a plan to demolish it to provide a car park was submitted in October by Chiltern Railways, which due to the outcome of listed status was withdrawn. Buckinghamshire County Council had also drawn up plans to provide a transport interchange on the site, which have also had to be amended.

Although the future use of the building has not yet been decided it could be adapted or incorporated into the proposed transport interchange or turned into a visitor centre serving the people of High Wycombe in a similar use to what it was designed to do nearly 150 years ago.

A number of original contract drawings and maps showing the old station have been located but only one photograph has been found that clearly shows the whole building, which will celebrate its 150th anniversary of opening in three years' time.

Although we have found many plans, photographs and drawings which we put on public display whenever opportunities arise, we are always looking for additional information and photographs. If you have

anything we might be able to look at or copy we would be pleased to hear from you, as in the future we would like to compile a detailed book on the history of this line. We are interested not only in the stations but also bridges and any other features like adjacent pubs, cottages etc. All costs would be reimbursed.

If you find the early history of the Wycombe Railway interesting, as well as other broad gauge railways of Great Britain, then membership of the Broad Gauge Society might be for you. The society offers a bimonthly newsletter plus a glossy twice yearly magazine "The Broadsheet". For modellers there is access to kits and other goodies to make modelling easier. Please ask for a prospectus and products catalogue.

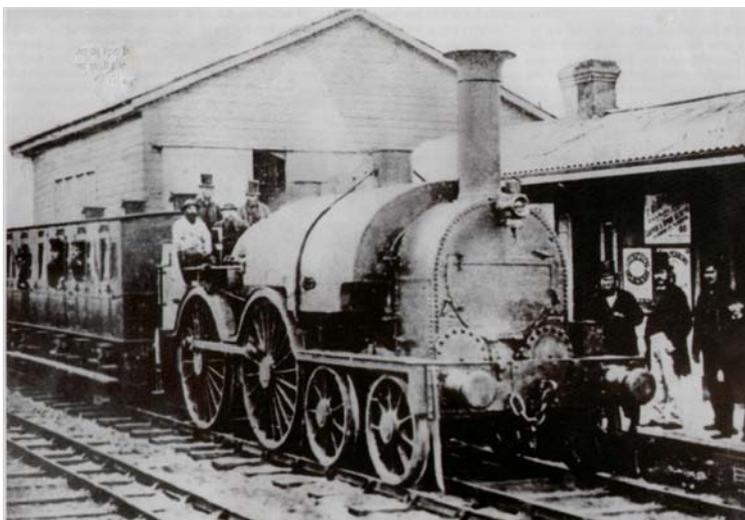
David Lane

If you can help with this fascinating work, contact David Lane on 01296 437475. And if you are just interested to discover more, attend his illustrated talk at Princes Risborough Community Centre on Tuesday March 20th at 7.30pm. It will be brilliant!

Update – the future of the historic station

We understand that the listing of the old station building is being taken into account in the work of an ad hoc round table group that has been set up to progress all aspects of the Station development (see previous issues). Existing plans are being reviewed with a view to accommodating the more historic parts of the building in the scheme. This is not a guarantee that the building will be saved in High Wycombe, but it is the right first step.

We think the best thing that could happen to the building is that it would be restored to the handsome appearance it had in Brunel's day and be put into use as a heritage centre. Of course, that is far easier said than done, but it would surely be the right way to go.



The broad-gauge locomotive "Lance", shown here at Redruth on dual-gauge tracks in 1867, was based at High Wycombe in 1862 and would have been stabled in the surviving engine shed.

Pann Mill

What a Surprise!

IT WOULDN'T have been right, would it? I mean, could we have sent a hardworking lass off to Somerset without marking the occasion in a modest and appropriate way?

And so it was that on Sunday 18th February, some 40 or so of Myra's friends from the Society and the Mills Group gathered beside the Pann Mill workshop to wish her and Ian au revoir and bonne chance in their new venture to run an oh-so-select guest house at Williton not far from the sea in North Somerset.

Annie Woodward had done stalwart work in setting up the tables and purchasing large quantities of a bubbly liquid. Peter Hazzard (for the Mills Group) and Chris Woodman (in the absence of Chairman and Hon. Secretary) had prepared something to say, presents had been bought and somebody had even managed to persuade the February sun to shine.

Peter, as the longest-serving team member under Myra's leadership, described the historic contribution that Myra had made, in the years since the new Pann Mill building was financed by Marks & Spencer in 1984, in picking up the project by the scruff of its neck and driving it forward with a combination of drive, charm, people-skills and sheer resourcefulness, culminating in the milling of corn on 14 May 2000. In the last push, Peter said, Myra had succeeded in getting 23 people working in her team. She had also solicited much assistance from skilled experts. She had been a model manager, who had never been heard to say a word in anger, or to throw a paintbrush in desperation. Peter presented Myra with a copy of George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, an appropriate choice. Indeed the book was published in the year, 1860, that the current

water wheel was installed, but Peter rightly pointed out that we did not want Myra and Ian to suffer the same fate as the heroine and hero of that book – being washed out to sea in a storm and drowned!

Chris described how progress had been, oh, so slow before Myra took the lead, and then, on behalf of the Society, presented Myra with an exquisitely carved wooden spoon by local craftsman and member, Stuart King.

Toasts were drunk and a standard Pann Mill get-together ensued.

Life at t'Mill will be different without Myra, and she leaves a gap that no-one else will fill in quite the same way. But the team that Myra and her co-workers on the project built up is not dependent on any one of its members. The project will live on and thrive. There will be three open days this year when corn will be ground, and the working parties will continue on the 1st and 3rd Sundays of every month right through the summer, so guests will always be welcome to be escorted round the works on those occasions too.

While Myra's new aspiration is to run a successful hostelry, Ian plans to build a name for himself in the world of children's books. His skills as an illustrator will not be totally lost to the Society, since he has magnanimously volunteered to continue to produce graphic material for us – provided we tell him what's happened in the last quarter. We shall do our best.

We wish them both every possible success in their new life, and hope to see them back in Wycombe from time to time.

After the presentations...



it's farewell to old friends...



but at least she'll be well looked after...



and she's got something to remember us by!

Quarterly meeting

One Amazing Evening

IT CERTAINLY was for the 62 people who came to the quarterly meeting on 9th January, when Dr Jill Eyres was invited to speak on Local Geology. From the start it was obvious that Dr Eyres, the geologist, was not a stuffy academic, more a friendly expert able to impart scientific information in an open and enthusiastic way.

Jill Eyres began by explaining that, unlike the Lake District or Scotland, High Wycombe's geology is not so visible. It is hidden, demanding more detective work to find out what lies underneath. One clue is the type of vegetation, as rocks influence what lies above. Local boreholes (at Thame and Princes Risborough) reveal the types of rocks at the bottom of the layers of sediment. The layers build up with the oldest at the bottom and the youngest at the top. Sinking boreholes is an expensive operation – funds have not yet been found to sink one in High Wycombe.

The first of the astounding facts unearthed (sorry!) from these local boreholes was that this was an area of explosive volcanoes around 550 million years ago. There have never been volcanoes here since.

Another surprising fact (to me, anyway, as a geology illiterate) was that Scotland was once separate from England. It is a separate area of crust. Eventually the two met and then travelled as one. We were then in the Antarctic and have been moving northwards ever since.

Jill brought a selection of rock samples which were passed around for the audience to handle. As our country has moved across the hemispheres, all climates from the Antarctic northwards have been experienced. One of the rock samples was desert sandstone from Penrith. Another was a grey rock with sea lily fossils proving that the creatures fossilised had come from clear tropical waters.

The formation of our local chalk was caused by the biggest global warming in the earth's history. The porosity of chalk was a factor in making the characteristic kind of soil found in our neighbourhood. As the top layers of chalk were dissolved away by the rain, a sediment of clay and flints was left behind, so common on the tops of Chiltern slopes and such a curse for gardeners. The flints themselves were made at the bottom of the sea: they grow as a kind of jelly around decaying animals and then harden as they attract silica.

Some local geological evidence is now visible. The cutting at Stokenchurch reveals the sea floor trapped between the rock layers. Sarsen stones, very hard sandstone, telling a story of tropical rivers, can be seen in a number of localities, for example, around the green at Bradenham. The rocks quarried at Denner Hill

came from sarsen stones.

One of the special features of the Chilterns is the dry valleys. Jill conjured up a dramatic picture of how these formed. If you had stood on West Wycombe Hill during the thaw after one of the ice ages, you would have seen huge torrents of meltwaters, carving out the valleys either side of Bledlow Ridge and flowing away down along the West Wycombe Road to the Thames and the sea!

When Jill began her talk, she threatened to lob her rock specimens at anyone who nodded off. There was no need! We were all attentive, fascinated by the way in which such a complicated subject could be explained so clearly.

After several interesting questions, we were invited to look at a series of maps of the local rock strata with High Wycombe conveniently marked by a sticker.

Peter Hazzard thanked Dr Eyres for an excellent presentation, pointing out that Jill is a regular WEA tutor and recommending her booklet (one of a series) "Rocks for Geological Walks in South Buckinghamshire". We hope to have copies of this on sale with our publications shortly.

Annie Woodward

Transport: Corridors (continued from p.5)

the mini-roundabouts again) and to make the bus lanes more effective. On the *eastbound* carriageway, there would be segments of bus lane approaching the junctions with Mickfield Road, Rayners Lane and Station Road Loudwater.

This may sound complicated and it will be very important that great care is taken with the design and marking to make the scheme safer than it is now. But the Society is strongly in favour of all moves to make public transport in the District work better, and we ought to support this scheme if it can be shown to be safe and effective.

Late News – Handy Cross Study

As we go to press, we hear that Keith Hill MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary at the DETR, is to visit Wycombe on 8 March and will announce the long-awaited results of the multi-modal Handy Cross study.

West End Story

IN JANUARY, an intriguing letter fell into the editorial letterbox. It came from Mrs Phyllis Willson who lives in a Victorian terrace west of the town centre, and who declared herself to be 92 years old and a founder member of our Society. She went on:

"I feel rather aggrieved - I feel the magazine is very Rye orientated. There is never a mention of the little River Wye at the bottom of my garden. In fact, the West End is very neglected in my opinion. We have a lovely garden and a clear little River Wye with plants, trout and a kingfisher, and in the summer, baby moorhens appear."

Mrs Willson realised *"what a great asset to the town is the Rye. We fought very hard in the 1950s and '60s to prevent the threatened road and development and in the end we won and the Rye is ours for ever."* But, she continued, the residents do their best to brighten their district with their gardens and window boxes, and, she felt, succeed in bringing beauty to their area.

Well, perhaps Mrs Willson had a point. I was delighted when she agreed to be interviewed for the Newsletter.

Phyllis Willson lives in a charming, refurbished Victorian terraced house, surrounded by fascinating family photographs from the years gone by, right up to present day. One of the most recent shows four of her great-grandchildren. One of the earliest, believed to have been taken by her father, is of her grandfather Wharton, standing proprietorially in his bowler hat ("to designate that he was boss!") in front of his Desborough Street factory at the end of the 19th century, along with all his employees, the women in pinafores, including Phyllis' mother.

Phyllis was born in Desborough Street. No, she wasn't born in hospital because you didn't go to hospital to give birth in those days. By the standards of the day, Wycombe was well off, with little of the grinding poverty that prevailed in northern industrial towns. It was renowned for "Chairs, Chapels and Children". "There was nothing but chapels, we all went to Chapel." Chapel life prevailed because John Wesley had preached in the town in the 1770s. Phyllis' mother and father both worked at Grandpa Wharton's factory making Windsor chairs.

They were lucky. A benevolent employer, Mr Wharton had been Mayor of High Wycombe in 1908: his alderman's robes are in Wycombe Museum. He gave his employees a week off every year – always the first week in August. A highlight of Phyllis' childhood, at the age of nine, was a seaside holiday at Hastings. "Oh, the excitement of it. It was almost unbearable. We had a horse and trap, you see, and one of



the men from the factory drove us to the station, and the excitement of going to London. The trains were very good then. Going down to Hastings, staying in a hotel near the sea. The wonder of the sea. I thought the sea was just off Hastings. I didn't think it was anywhere else! It was quite a shock when we learned geography and we found we were surrounded by it!"

That was during the First World War. As the family sat on the beach, they could hear the boom of the guns across the channel. Phyllis pointed to the photograph again: nearly all the men in it were killed in the war. Her own Uncle Rupert had died on the Somme. Eventually, her own father had been called to Didcot to sign on. Her mother cried all day. There was much celebration when eventually Father was rejected on account of his flat feet. (Flat feet or not, he lived to 93!)

As a young child, Phyllis went to Green Street School (only recently closed). From there she won a scholarship to the High School, at that time in Hampden Road (the building which subsequently became the Lady Verney School and is tastefully converted to flats). "There was no eleven-plus: you had an exam and an oral exam." Phyllis stayed at school to age 17 and then went to Training College before returning at age 20 and teaching a class of 48 nine-year-olds at Spring Gardens School. "Solid blocks of children, and there was no trouble whatsoever, no discipline trouble."

Phyllis cycled to her work. "And of course it was all sort of hiking and cycling and tennis in those days." She met her husband, Joe, on the tennis court. They married at Wesley Church in Priory Road – one of the bridesmaids subsequently died in the blitz – and then moved out to Hughenden (we would now call it Hughenden Valley), but not for long. Joe worked for the Pru. Initially he used his motorcycle and then a Morgan three-wheeler to get out to the villages to sell policies on the doorsteps, but that was just the beginning of a career which saw him transferred to East

Anglia and around the Home Counties. Eventually, in 1943, they were able to get back to High Wycombe, where they lived in a house at the north end of Mill End Road (for which they paid £800) until Joe's death in 1960. During the war, Joe spent his non-working hours up on West Wycombe Hill on Home Guard activity.

Twenty years after the tragedy of Joe's death, a further disaster struck: a car accident, which left Phyllis with limited mobility. Her younger son Bill (who himself died a few years ago aged 54) already lived nearby and Phyllis moved close to him soon after.

And a wonderfully suitable house it is for an old person. A long garden, beautifully tended by Phyllis' other son, John (also a member of the Society), stretches down to the babbling Wye. There is a summerhouse for those warm summer afternoons. The Wye is high at the moment: precautionary sandbags had only just been removed from Phyllis' back door.

We chatted on. If Hastings had been an exciting excursion in Phyllis' youth, that had not stopped her travelling widely by aeroplane 40 or 50 years later, from Bulgaria ("the ancient Thrac") to Barbados.



But we had to come back to the River, which Phyllis loves so much. "Actually, it rises near Radnage. I've seen the springs." I was doubtful, but afterwards I consulted the map and knew she must be right. In dry spells, the river may materialise out of the ground near West Wycombe, but after the recent rain it is not only deeper but also longer than it has been for many years.

The Wye is a tremendous asset to the District, not just where it passes beside the Rye, but right from West Wycombe through Wycombe's west end, and down past Kingsmead to Wooburn and Bourne End as well.

It took a letter from a wonderful 92-year-old lady to remind me of that!

Chairman's View: Remembering our Society's Friends

Immediately before Christmas I was joined by Ann Simone to visit our Society President, Mr John Mayes, at the Cookham Residential Home where he is now comfortably domiciled. I am glad to report that we found Mr Mayes in very good spirits, and we gave him appropriate greetings from Society members.

At about the same time, our industrious Pann Mill gardener, Margaret Simmons, was recovering from a most unfortunate impact with a motor vehicle, driven without sufficient care, near the bus station. I visited Margaret in the new wing of Wycombe Hospital and was very relieved to witness her remarkable cheerfulness despite her aches and pains. A veritable eco-warrior! Happily, Myra King had spread the word, and a number of her High Wycombe Society friends had also visited Margaret in her ward.

At about this time, however, I was a little chastened to find out that Elsie Fowler, another of our veteran members, had relocated from her Bowden Lane house to the Shelburne Lodge residential home at Rutland Street, High Wycombe. Most of us were unaware of this, but Elsie's intrepid Society postwoman, Prue Meek, had identified her new address, and continued to deliver recent issues of the Newsletter to Elsie's new abode.

These episodes brought back to me, personally, the thought that all of us who are active (or inactive!) subscribing members of the High Wycombe Society should endeavour to keep in contact with those who had formerly made positive contributions to our shared environmental concerns and campaigns, but are now much less able to remain involved in our activities.

Is there a veteran member living near you, who might appreciate some contact, and perhaps an occasional visit?

Many of us try to make our Society a welcoming Conservation Group. We should also make it a remembering Society.

Roger Lawson

NT Trips

The National Trust welcomes us on their trips. Please mention the Society when you ring.

24 April - Gloucester - £10. Nothing organised in Gloucester but plenty to do. Phone Mrs Juliet Davis on 01494 488305.

18 July - Worcester - £11. Nothing organised in Worcester, but the porcelain museum sounds wonderful. Phone Mrs Joyce Styles on 01494 528545.

Notices

New Members

We warmly welcome the following new members:

Mr P B Gotch and Ms J Coles of Studley Green
Mr M A Hutchings of Marys Mead, Hazlemere
Mr P H Lowry of Amersham Road, Hazlemere
Cllr C M Shafique of Deeds Grove

Obituary

We regret to announce the death of:

Mrs B A Tordoff

We extend our condolences to her family and friends.

We're all different...

Just one month after our Annual General Meeting is our contribution to the ever-successful Wycombe Arts Festival. Julian Hunt, the County Records Manager, will show us what is the same, and what is different, about High Wycombe, Amersham and Chesham, and why. Note: not a mention of Aylesbury!

You'll Never Drive Alone!

With this issue of the *Newsletter* we enclose a leaflet issued by Bucks County Council about car-sharing. Yes, *you* can help Wycombe's traffic

problems by sharing your car. Plus, you may even save money. Bucks Carshare brings together people who make similar journeys at approximately the same time.

So read the leaflet and see if *you* can participate. If you've already lost the leaflet, then phone 01628 810010 for another!

AGM

AGM

AGM

What's been going on, then?

Come to the Annual General Meeting on Tuesday 24 April 2001 and find out what your Society has done over the past year. Each Group will present a short report on its activities.

And if you would like to be more involved in "what goes on", why not chat to the speakers and perhaps join a Group?

We want to hear from you!

Thank you for all your contributions this quarter. If *you* think the *Newsletter* is barking up the wrong tree (or just barking mad!), why don't *you* write to the Editor? You don't even have to be a member! And you certainly don't need to type it.

Material for the Summer 2001 issue should reach me at 29 Maybrook Gardens High Wycombe HP13 6PJ (01494 528106) by **20 May**, please.

Chris Woodman (Hon Editor)

Put these in your diary **now!**

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

2001

Tuesday 24 April 7.30pm
Reggie Goves Centre

Quarterly Meeting, comprising Annual General Meeting, and short reports by each of the Society's Groups.

Sunday 13 May 11am - 5pm
Pann Mill

National Mills Day. Pann Mill grinding corn.

Town Trail. Start at South Porch of Parish Church, 2.30pm.

Water Trail. Start at Pann Mill, 2.30pm.

Tuesday 22 May 7.45pm
(DATE CHANGED)
Reggie Goves Centre

Arts Festival Meeting: "Three Chiltern Market Towns – Amersham, Chesham and Wycombe."
Speaker: Julian Hunt, County Records and Local Studies Manager, Aylesbury Library.

Saturday 23 June

Hidden Bucks Tour No.4 – tour by car for those with or without their own car. Details to be announced later. Please register your interest with Ann Simone on 01494 448773.

Saturday 30 June 10.30am-noon
Wycombe Museum

Coffee Morning, with Bring & Buy Stall. Seize the opportunity to see Walter J Stamps' paintings: "A More Than Local Artist".

Thursday 12 July 7.45pm
Reggie Goves Centre

Quarterly Meeting: "Community Transport – Present and Future". Speaker: Kathleen Lyons, The Community Transport Association.